

THE IMPACT OF RHETORICAL THEORY AND  
PRACTICE UPON THE POETRY OF  
WALT WHITMAN

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## WALT WHITMAN AND ORATORY

At the Third Annual Meeting of the Walt Whitman Fellowship, in 1896, Thomas J. Harned read a paper entitled "Walt Whitman and Oratory," and this presentation was the first public announcement of the poet's apparently deep and abiding interest in public speaking.<sup>1</sup> This interest immediately captured the attention of scholars, and as William Finkel observes:

No one who today begins a serious study of Walt Whitman can for long remain uninformed about his great interest in the spoken word, or of the effect of that interest on the form of his poetry.<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult to find any extended analysis of Whitman's life and writing which does not contain some reference to his interest in 'oratory,' the word customarily used in these discussions; however, the pervasiveness of this influence and the effect which it may have had upon Leaves of Grass have been points of contention in the long debate about the poetry and its author.

Varied interpretations have been presented as to the extent which oratory influenced Whitman as he wrote his poetry, and this situation calls for an attempt to reach some resolution in regard to the conflicting opinions. In addition, Finkel has called for a revaluation on the basis of his analysis of manuscript notes and clippings preserved by

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<sup>1</sup>Reprinted in The Complete Writings of Walt Whitman, ed. Richard M. Bucke, Thomas B. Harned, and Horace L. Traubel (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1902), VIII, 244-60.

<sup>2</sup>William L. Finkel, "Walt Whitman's Manuscript Notes on Oratory," American Literature, XXIII (March, 1950), p. 29.



Whitman.<sup>3</sup> Much of the speculation about Whitman's interest in oratory has stemmed from considerations of these materials, and Finkel has shown that most of the notes and clippings post-date the first edition of Leaves of Grass.<sup>4</sup> Although the conflicting interpretations and Finkel's challenge have encouraged a new assessment of Whitman's interest in oratory, the present study received primary impetus from the fact that earlier evaluations have employed a methodology based upon the categorical separation of rhetoric and poetic.

A primary purpose of the present study is to demonstrate that any meaningful discussion of the relationships between rhetoric and poetic must rest upon relative and pluralistic distinctions, not upon a categorical separation. This means that a critical method must be described, but of equal importance is the application of this method in a discussion of the relationships between Whitman's interest in the spoken word and his poetry. In order to accomplish these goals, the present essay will be devoted to a survey of previous research, a description of the typical method utilized in that research, and an overview of the approach to be employed in the present study.

It is intended that the survey of previous research be just that—a survey. It is not presented as an exhaustive examination in the sense of including every reference and opinion in print. The purposes of this study are best served by an examination which is exhaustive in the sense that it includes representative samples from all variety of critical opinion. The following survey attempts that kind of completeness.

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<sup>3</sup>Finkel, "Whitman's Manuscript Notes," pp. 29-53.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

Although some writers ignore any consideration of oratory in relation to Leaves of Grass,<sup>5</sup> they constitute a minority because most scholars feel this interest to be worthy of attention.<sup>6</sup> However, the majority opinion presents a wide range in the degree of importance which is assigned to Whitman's attraction to the spoken word. After granting that Whitman was very definitely interested in oratory, one segment of the majority either dismisses or discounts any influence which oratory may have had in the production of Leaves of Grass.

Roger Asselineau is one of those who dismisses the importance of the interest in oratory.<sup>7</sup> His study is a consideration of Whitman's writing in those "years after 1855 during which the poet at last became himself."<sup>8</sup> Most interested in the forces operative after the first edition of Leaves of Grass, he does mention that Whitman thought of taking to the lecture platform, but after examining this possible career in the light of Whitman's having belonged to the Smithtown Debating Society, his political speeches, and his written comments about public speaking, Asselineau concludes that the interest in lecturing grew as Leaves of Grass failed to become a financial success.<sup>9</sup> He argues that

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<sup>5</sup>See Floyd Stovall, Walt Whitman (New York: American Book Co., 1939); A Treasury of Great Poems, ed. Louis Untermeyer (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1942), pp. 889-916; Major American Writers, ed. Howard Mumford Jones and Ernest E. Leisy (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1945), pp. 117-1206.

<sup>6</sup>Finkel, "Whitman's Manuscript Notes," p. 30.

<sup>7</sup>Roger Asselineau, The Evolution of Walt Whitman The Creation of a Personality (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960).

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 96-97.

Whitman gave up the idea of becoming an orator because he did not have the physical qualifications of the good speaker, because he "knew very well that in practice he would inevitably fail."<sup>10</sup>

In the second volume of his study, Asselineau remarks that his subject is, "Leaves of Grass, whereas the first volume was devoted to the 'creation' of Whitman's personality."<sup>11</sup> As could have been predicted from the comments in the first volume, he discounts the influence from oratory, saying:

Some commentators, impressed by the fact that there were many notes upon the art of oratory among Whitman's papers, have claimed that he wanted to apply to poetry the rules of rhetoric and eloquence. Nothing is more false. No speech has ever consisted of such enumerations and litanies as are found in Leaves of Grass. Besides, oratory and poetry were for Whitman two separate activities which he would have liked to carry on simultaneously, but which he did not confuse.<sup>12</sup>

He goes on to cite a note in which Whitman seems to have contemplated a dual career as poet and lecturer, and adds:

Thus, he himself very clearly distinguished the rhapsodic accumulations of his poems from the logical sequences and close concatenations of arguments on which the periodic style of an orator is founded.<sup>13</sup>

A similar position is taken by another Whitman scholar, Gay W. Allen,<sup>14</sup> although he is less specific in rejecting the importance of any

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Roger Asselineau, The Evolution of Walt Whitman The Creation of a Book (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. v.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>14</sup>Gay Wilson Allen, Walt Whitman Handbook (Chicago: Packard, 1946).

influence from oratory. He discusses the interest in connection with literary techniques employed in Leaves of Grass, but he feels that oratory should be considered a possible influence and not a significant factor.<sup>15</sup> He does mention some of the research which bears directly upon the topic, but only in relation to Whitman's use of parentheses, and this as a sub-topic in the analysis of the organic unity in rhythmic form.<sup>16</sup> There, oratory does not emerge as an important factor; instead, Allen finds pantheism and transcendentalism to be the true sources of Whitman's technique, for he feels that Whitman was attempting "to indicate the path between reality and the soul." And this is why both the theory and expression must always remain vague and ambiguous."<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, under the heading of "The Expanding Ego,"<sup>18</sup> Allen says of Whitman's cataloguing technique, "However unselected the mass of images may seem to some readers, he intended them to symbolize a pantheistic unit of himself and all creation."<sup>19</sup> These comments coincide with Allen's interpretation of Whitman as philosopher, and from this position he argues that the task which Whitman faced in accomplishing his avowed mission made it impossible for the poet to give a precise statement regarding his literary technique.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 375-441.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 418-20.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 378-79.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 382-87.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 384.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 378-79.

The same overview is used to cement a bond between Whitman and Emerson and to reject oratory as an influence, and after describing Emerson as the neo-platonist, Allen says:

Thus to Emerson, words are symbols of symbols. Above all they are images with spiritual significance. Even more to him than to the philologist, "Every word was once a poem," and language itself "is fossil poetry."<sup>21</sup>

He contends that Whitman accepted this same attitude toward the use of words, and concludes:

Thus in his desire to explore life, personality, and the inner meaning of Being, Whitman turned to Emerson's theory of symbols for guidance in the development of a literary technique. By imaginative identification of his own ego with the creative processes of nature, and by the vicarious exploration of all forms of existence, he evolved the technique of panoramic imagery, "Organically echoing a subjective harmony and rhythm of his own Soul," and revealing by "hints" and "indirections" the spiritual truths of the universe. Both in form and content LEAVES OF GRASS is primarily cosmic, pantheistic, and democratic, and Walt Whitman's literary technique is admirably adapted for his "purports and facts and is the analogy of them."<sup>22</sup>

Further evidence of Allen's evaluation is to be found in two recent books where he makes no mention of Whitman's interest in oratory,<sup>23</sup> and something of the same pattern is exhibited in Emory Holloway's position. In one place he suggests that the interest is of importance,<sup>24</sup> but in his essay for the Cambridge History of American Literature he states that the critics are not in agreement as to the sources of the stylistic devices employed in Leaves of Grass, and oratory is not one of the

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 430-31.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 436-37.

<sup>23</sup>See Walt Whitman (New York: Grove Press, 1961); Walt Whitman as Man, Poet, and Legend (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961).

<sup>24</sup>The Uncollected Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman, ed. Emory Holloway (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1921), I, xxv.

possibilities listed.<sup>25</sup>

Having considered the position which recognizes that Whitman was interested in oratory but which attaches no real importance to that interest in the examination of his poetry, we now turn to the majority within the majority, those who feel that the poet's attraction to the spoken word is definitely reflected in Leaves of Grass. That this is the predominant judgment is readily observed, for it appears even in discussions which do not focus upon this aspect of Whitman's background. In his description of the literature from the Feminine Fifties, Frederick Pattee comments upon the declamatory ring of Leaves of Grass,<sup>26</sup> and says, "Its creator had before him people whom he felt he was addressing. I fancy he moved his lips as he wrote his sentences."<sup>27</sup> And Benjamin Spencer's study of the search for nationalism in American letters reveals much the same attitude toward Whitman's poetic effort.<sup>28</sup> Spencer suggests that any national spokesman had to be concerned with "indigenous forces at work in popular speech,"<sup>29</sup> and noting that this advice was given to writers in the years before 1860, he says that it was "largely disregarded until Whitman."<sup>30</sup> Elsewhere in this study the notion that

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<sup>25</sup>Emory Holloway, "Whitman" Cambridge History of American Literature, ed. William F. Trent, John Erskine, Stuart F. Sherman, and Carl Van Doren (New York: Macmillan Co., 1938), II, 258-74.

<sup>26</sup>Frederick Lewis Pattee, The Feminine Fifties (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1940), p. 40.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>28</sup>Benjamin T. Spencer, The Quest for Nationality (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1957).

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 133.



popular oratory lay behind Whitman's efforts is implicit in the development.<sup>31</sup> Of course, a substantial body of research and speculation lies behind the generally accepted position, and Thomas Harned's paper which was mentioned earlier will be examined first.

As one of Whitman's literary executors, Harned has access to materials which were not generally available, and capitalizing upon that opportunity, he based his paper on unpublished manuscripts and clippings that Whitman had collected.<sup>32</sup> Concentrating upon the contents of two notebooks, one devoted to oratory, the other to lectures, Harned established a precedent because almost everyone who has had occasion to discuss Whitman's interest in oratory has had recourse to this same materials.<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, Harned was not particularly skillful in handling the materials from these notebooks, for, like so many of Whitman's associates, he lacked objectivity when discussing his idol.

The paper is introduced with a Whitmanesque tally of the various attributes which qualified Whitman to have been a great orator-- "commanding stature," "courage, firmness, and resolution," "cheery, ringing, clarion voice," "sympathy with humanity," and "originality" are but a few of the qualities listed.<sup>34</sup> Harned announces that any virtue in the paper resides in his having permitted Whitman to speak for himself,

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 53 ff., 131 ff.

<sup>32</sup>Harned, "Walt Whitman and Oratory."

<sup>33</sup>See discussion by Finkel in "Whitman's Manuscript Notes." Unfortunately these notebooks have been lost from the Library of Congress holdings and are no longer available for study. For a discussion of the missing manuscripts, see "Ten Notebooks and a Cardboard Butterfly Missing from the Walt Whitman Papers," (Washington: The Library of Congress, 1954).

<sup>34</sup>Harned, p. 244.

and as this would indicate, quotations are extensive and interpretation is restricted. In his one attempt to draw any sort of conclusion, Harned says that Whitman was aware that the study of oratory was a long, arduous process, that this encouraged careful attention to the details of composition, and that:

Whitman subsequently carried out his views of composition in the writing of his poems. Few have any realization of the effort that he used in his endeavors always to get the exact word to express every shade of meaning he wished to convey.<sup>35</sup>

Despite this rather questionable inference, Harned at least made the attempt, and the public presentation of his thesis immediately prompted further inquiries into this facet of Whitman's background, and additional evidence was uncovered, some of which was mentioned in the discussion of Asselineau's study.

Among those immediately attracted to the evidence was Henry Binns. In his biography of Whitman, published in 1905,<sup>36</sup> he points to the impression which Hicks, the Quaker preacher, and Booth, the actor, made upon the poet,<sup>37</sup> and Binns contends that the reaction to these men accounts for the oratorical quality of Whitman's poetry, saying, "For the first time, he understood how far gestures, and a presence more powerful than words, can express the heights and depths of emotion."<sup>38</sup> In a biography published in the following year, Bliss Perry agrees with Binns,<sup>39</sup> and after considering the sentence structure in Leaves of Grass,

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>36</sup>Henry Binns, A Life of Walt Whitman (London: Methuen, 1905).

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 14-22.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>39</sup>Bliss Perry, Walt Whitman: His Life and Work (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1906).



he remarks, "Not to apprehend Leaves of Grass as a Man speaking is to miss its purport."<sup>40</sup> Henry Seidel Canby follows the pattern in his survey of significant figures in the field of American letters.<sup>41</sup> He suggests that the spread-eagle oratory of the nineteenth century provided an emotional outlet for the spokesmen of democracy, and says that this type of oratory nurtured Whitman's desire to become the "natural voice" of democracy in America.<sup>42</sup> In a later and more detailed biography, Canby refers to Whitman's fondness for declamation in his youth, concluding that this habit provided an acquaintance with the plays and the rhetorical background of the seventeenth century,<sup>43</sup> with the result that:

His poems--hundreds of them--and especially his addresses and his catalogues are composed for cumulative effect. Their typical structure usually resembles a speech, still more a sermon.<sup>44</sup>

Canby not only concurs with Binns and Perry, but his study was conducted along similar lines. These men were biographers, and Whitman's interest in oratory was, in their eyes, a factor which had to be considered as one approached Leaves of Grass. But as biographers, they were faced with a mass of data, and they did not give extended treatment to any one aspect of Whitman's background. They were not attempting the close analysis which characterizes so much of current criticism; rather, they were attempting to account for the nature of Leaves of Grass on the basis

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 97. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>41</sup>Henry S. Canby, Classic Americans (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1931).

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., pp. 313-14.

<sup>43</sup>Henry S. Canby, Walt Whitman, An American: A Study in Biography (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1943), p. 310.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 311.

of an investigation into all aspects of Whitman's varied interests and experiences. Quite naturally, their comments about the influence of oratory tended to rest at the level of generalization with supporting evidence being fragmentary.

A biographer who went somewhat farther with his examination is Frederik Schyberg. Published in 1933, with an English translation and revision made available in 1960, his study is, like Asselineau's, an attempt to trace the evolution in succeeding editions of Leaves of Grass.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, Schyberg attaches some importance to the influence of oratory, citing Perry's conclusion about "man speaking" and saying, "This is the main clue to an understanding of Whitman's special diction; the peculiarities and oddities can almost all be explained in this way."<sup>46</sup> He goes on to mention the conversational quality which is a part of the direct, spoken language. This quality and the use of parenthetic expressions are cited as characteristic of Whitman's poetry,<sup>47</sup> and Schyberg says, "It is likewise an orator who composes 'Song of Myself,' and an essential share of the effect of the poem depends on that fact. It is full of rhetorical tricks."<sup>48</sup> However, Schyberg is much more taken with other facets of Whitman's personality and background, and his discussion of the impact of oratory does not rise above this mention of rhetorical tricks.

There is a group of writers which goes beyond the consideration of rhetorical tricks, for they attach great importance to Whitman's interest

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<sup>45</sup>Frederik Schyberg, Walt Whitman, trans. Evie A. Allen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951).

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., pp. 109-10.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

in oratory. They feel that this interest is one of the key elements in understanding the poet and his work, and the first of this group to be discussed is Clifton Furness.

With the purpose of contributing a "composite picture of Walt Whitman, the literary workman,"<sup>49</sup> Furness offered his collection of previously unpublished materials in 1928. He utilized many of the materials which had been used by Harned, and a large proportion of the text and notes is given over to an examination of the notebooks on oratory and lectures.<sup>50</sup> In an observation that has become commonplace in Whitman scholarship, Furness says:

He was not certain for a long time himself whether his avenue of approach to the public should be through the lecture platform, the printed broadside and newspaper article, or the more quiet and dignified published volume of verse.<sup>51</sup>

This contention that Whitman had difficulty in deciding upon the method to employ in delivering his message is predicated upon the notion that Whitman had a vocational call to deliver his message.<sup>52</sup> With this assumption in mind, Furness examines the notes on oratory and lectures, and he concludes that Whitman was driven to consider public address as a possible medium for presentation, saying, "He regarded it as an important phase of his work as a national spokesman,"<sup>53</sup> and:

The perusal of Whitman's notes on Oratory reveals the fact that he has a fully defined an ideal of a new and freshly American

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<sup>49</sup>Walt Whitman's Workshop, ed. Clifton J. Furness (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1928), p. 3.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 27-68, 195-224.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., pp. 12-13.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., pp. 9-12.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

style in oratory as he had in other arts, specifically poetry and music.<sup>54</sup>

A bit of hero worship creeps into such conclusions, and when the discussion turns to Whitman's habit of declamation Furness says that "in order to understand the fluent, orotund tone of his verse, it is essential to realize that the fountain head of his poetry was in oral declamation."<sup>55</sup> The "fluent, orotund tone" is never specifically defined, but despite the shortcomings, Furness made a real effort to point up some of the relationships between Whitman's interest in oratory and his poetry, and the book contains a body of material which is pertinent to any discussion of this aspect of the poet's background.

The most extended examination of Whitman's interest was published in Paris, in 1930.<sup>56</sup> The writer, Jean Catel, is greatly indebted to the notes and clippings which were available in the Library of Congress, but he includes additional materials, most of which have been mentioned in this survey. Catel is particularly taken with Whitman's interest in the theatre, and in an earlier study he had proposed that Whitman might have worked in the Park Theatre, in New York, thus gaining a most intimate knowledge of the acting of the period.<sup>57</sup> Schyberg points out that there is no evidence to support this conclusion,<sup>58</sup> but the hypothesis indicates the lengths to which Catel goes in order to establish the relationships

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>56</sup>Jean Catel, Rythme et Langage dans le Ire Edition des Leaves of Grass (1855) (Paris: Rieder, 1930).

<sup>57</sup>Jean Catel, Walt Whitman: La Naissance du Poete (Paris: Rieder, 1929), pp. 42-47.

<sup>58</sup>Schyberg, p. 96.

between oratory and Leaves of Grass. He claims that Whitman was prepared to offer an original treatise upon speaking, saying, "Whitman semble avoir voulu écrire une Rhetorique dont il avait déjà trouvé le titre. . . The Agonistic Arena."<sup>59</sup> More important, however, is the fact that Catel considers Whitman's Leaves of Grass to be a compromise between rhetorical and poetic utterance. Like Allen, he feels that Whitman was something of a mystic, and that he had to work out a use of language which was particularly fitted for his personal message.<sup>60</sup> His analysis includes the rhetorical devices such as the parenthesis, the rhetorical question, and the exclamations.<sup>61</sup> It also includes an examination of gesture as language, and after referring to a note in which Whitman suggested that the great orator may forget the time and place and enter into "that other more spiritual world," Catel says:

L'orateur, qui oublie le milieu matériel ou il parle pour ne plus écouter que son inspiration, c'est-à-dire cet élan et ce rythme qui semblent naître des premières phrases prononcées par une nécessité qui leur est propre, cet orateur entre dans une mystique oratoire qui est de la poésie.<sup>62</sup>

Similarly, Catel argues elsewhere that Whitman is, despite the influence from oratory, a poet who must transcend the oratorical background,<sup>63</sup> but at the same time, he concludes, as has been indicated, that Leaves of Grass represents a compromise because, "L'oeuvre whitmanienne de 1855 pose donc

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<sup>59</sup>Catel, Rythme et Langage, p. 34.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., pp. 30-60, 153-187.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., pp. 124-29.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., pp. 49-50.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., pp. 151-52.

le probleme d'une creation intermediaire entre la Rhetorique et la Versification."<sup>64</sup>

While he may go to some extremes in searching for possible impact from the spoken language, and while he may give undue credit to Whitman as a rhetorical theorist, Catel is systematic and thorough, and the importance of his investigation is indicated by the tributes of later writers. Schyberg, for example, terms it a "profound study;"<sup>65</sup> Allen remarks that it is a "penetrating analysis of style;"<sup>66</sup> and F. O. Matthiessen acknowledges that the work provided "many suggestions" for his own examination of Whitman's use of language.<sup>67</sup>

Matthiessen is one of the writers who finds Whitman's interest in oratory to be a significant influence in the shaping of Leaves of Grass, and his study is the last of this group which will be considered here. Although he is not in complete agreement with Catel, Matthiessen echoes some of the conclusions from the earlier study, as when he says that Whitman's "demand for the direct presence of speaking tones in poetry would put him in accord with the revolt of modern poets."<sup>68</sup> He adds, however, that Whitman was carried to extremes by "his belief that he could summon up a state or quality simply by articulating its name."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>65</sup>Schyberg, p. 40.

<sup>66</sup>Allen, Walt Whitman Handbook, p. 418.

<sup>67</sup>F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 556, n. 7.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 555.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 556.



After discussing Whitman's varied exposure to public speaking and the theatre, Matthiessen says of draft notes written between 1847 and 1855, "It is often impossible to tell whether passages of loosely rhythmical prose were originally conceived for a speech or as a draft towards a poem."<sup>70</sup> He does concur with those who believe that Whitman was not equipped to be the orator of his dreams,<sup>71</sup> but says that "his poetry never got clear of its rhetorical sources,"<sup>72</sup> and following an examination of some samples of Whitman's poetry, he observes:

It might seem that any connections between Whitman's poetry and its forensic base constituted his heaviest liability. Yet it remains equally true that his richest feelings were aroused by the sound and action of the voice, in a way that he tried often to describe. . . . He believed that you could realize the full beauty of a word only on those rare occasions when you heard it pronounced with modulation and timbre, and that such power of speech was the subtlest property of organic well-being. . . . The lurking, yet compelling charm of the voice was the ultimate token of personality.<sup>73</sup>

Nevertheless, Matthiessen points out that the rhythmic patterns in Leaves of Grass do not regularly approximate colloquial phrasing.<sup>74</sup> He contends, "In his best poetry his favorite oratorical figures, the questions and exclamations, the apostrophes and parenthetical asides, have all become personal,"<sup>75</sup> and says that this is the key to understanding the impact of oratory upon the poetry, for he feels that Whitman establishes personal contact with the reader but that this is accomplished by an

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 550.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 553.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 554.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 556.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 557.

assimilation of the traditional rhetorical devices into a kind of internal gesture, thereby making the bridge from "declamation to lyricism."<sup>76</sup> Not as extensive as Catel's study, Mattiessen's is the most recent attempt to make anything like a systematic analysis of Whitman's interest in oratory.

Whitman's attraction to public speaking is mentioned, however, in a 1962 study by Charles Dutton,<sup>77</sup> a study which presents the last critical position to be examined in this survey. Critics who take this position argue that oratory had a negative effect upon Leaves of Grass, and Dutton is extreme in this regard. He says that readers are "put off by the picture of Walt on stilts, like a barker at the fair, blowing his trumpet and shouting, 'Look at ME!'"<sup>78</sup> This implied condemnation of the oratorical influence is made most specific when Dutton says:

Whitman's failures nearly always occur when he is trying to be an orator instead of a poet. Sometimes it seems that Whitman should have worn the mask of the Old Southern Gambler, ceaselessly shuffling his cards of identity; whenever he wants to put something over on you he deals the card of the orator. When he is performing as an orator, not only does his language and imagery become crude and flat, but his vital subtlety of rhythm fails him.<sup>79</sup>

Many contemporary critics would agree with Dutton. Something of the same attitude appears in Ivor Winters' attack upon Whitman's poetry,<sup>80</sup> and R. P. Blackmur expresses a similar attitude when he insists that Whitman never reached self-discipline, saying, "Whitman characteristically

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Geoffrey Dutton, Whitman (New York: Grove Press, 1961).

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 93, Cf. pp. 33-34.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>80</sup>Ivor Winters, In Defense of Reason (New York: W. Morrow and Co., 1947).



let himself go in words, any words and by all means the handiest, until his impulse was used up."<sup>81</sup> Leslie Fiedler points out that such attacks grow out of the concern which modern criticism holds for the use of symbols, conceits, and paradox,<sup>82</sup> and the currency of the assault is evidenced by the remarks of writers who choose to defend Whitman. Their very terminology indicates that they are writing to an accepted critical position; thus, Randall Jarrel contends that, "Whitman was not a sweeping rhetorician,"<sup>83</sup> and David Daiches says:

Whitman was a rhetorician and a poseur, and these are bad words in modern criticism. But there are good and bad ways of being rhetorical, and good and bad ways of posing. In his best poetry, Whitman's rhetoric was a device for expanding lyrical impressionism into epic design, and his posing was a means of giving moral scope to his observation.<sup>84</sup>

This completes the sampling of representative opinion regarding the part which an interest in oratory may have played in shaping Leaves of Grass, and the survey points up the varied and conflicting nature of the different evaluations. Impressionistic criticism appears to be responsible for some of the variance, for unsupported assertions are used both to defend and condemn Whitman's interest in oratory. More importantly, previous research is limited because there is no study which gives attention to all aspects of Whitman's association with rhetorical theory and

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<sup>81</sup>R. P. Blackmur, Language as Gesture (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1952), p. 302.

<sup>82</sup>Leslie Fiedler, "Images of Walt Whitman," Leaves of Grass One Hundred Years After, ed. Milton Hindus (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1955), pp. 55-73.

<sup>83</sup>Randall Jarrell, Poetry and the Age (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 103.

<sup>84</sup>David Daiches, "Walt Whitman: Impressionist Prophet," One Hundred Years After, ed. Hindus, p. 110.

practice. Even Catel fails in this respect because he is most interested in explaining stylistic technique in Leaves of Grass, and is most concerned with the attempt to describe the transfer of oral discourse to the printed page. He does suggest that Whitman achieved a kind of compromise between rhetoric and poetic,<sup>85</sup> but even his study employs the categorical approach. The analysis is anchored in a separation of rhetoric and poetic into discrete spheres of language use. This is the most significant shortcoming in previous evaluations, and the approach is implicit in all of them. Matthiessen is explicit, however. He cites J. S. Mill's statement that "eloquence is heard; poetry is overheard," and concludes:

The blurring of that distinction by Emerson and Whitman did not result in a wider social appeal for their work. It meant, in many instances, a form that was neither quite one thing nor the other.<sup>86</sup>

He laments the confusion the period exhibited in its general "failure to distinguish between the nature of the two arts,"<sup>87</sup> and in his complaint we find the crux of the problem of methodology.

While "oratory" and "poetry" are the customary terms used in most studies, "speech," "oral discourse," and "rhetoric" are substituted for the former, and "literature," "written composition," and "poetic" for the latter. But whatever the terminology, the neat compartmentalization of rhetoric and poetic cannot but lead to difficulty when studying the relationships between the two modes, for as Donald C. Bryant points out:

Though sporadically the effort of critics and theorists has been to keep rhetoric and poetic apart, the two rationales have

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<sup>85</sup>Catel, Rythme et Langage, pp. 153-55.

<sup>86</sup>Matthiessen, pp. 22-23.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

had an irresistible tendency to come together, and their similarities may well be more important than their differences.<sup>88</sup>

The similarities render pat definitions meaningless and categorical separation impossible, for as Bryant goes on to say:

Very bothersome problems arise as soon as one attempts to define rhetoric, problems that lead so quickly to hairsplitting on the one hand or cosmic inclusiveness on the other, and to ethical or moral controversy, that the attempt usually ends in trifling with logomachies, gloss on Aristotle, or flat frustration.<sup>89</sup>

Any attempt to define poetry encounters comparable problems, and while some confusion results from usages which have developed within the two areas, there are inherent difficulties which have arisen because both modes rely upon a common base—language. Northrup Frye,<sup>90</sup> Gordon Bigelow,<sup>91</sup> R. S. Crane,<sup>92</sup> and David Daiches<sup>93</sup> are among the scholars who recognize the difficulties and who object to the rigid compartmentalization supported by other theorists.<sup>94</sup> After describing a variety

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<sup>88</sup>Donald C. Bryant, "Rhetoric: Its Functions and Its Scope," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXXIX (December, 1953), 424. Cf. Isabel C. Hungerland, Poetic Discourse ("University of California Publications in Philosophy," Vol. 33; Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1958).

<sup>89</sup>Bryant, p. 402.

<sup>90</sup>Northrup Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

<sup>91</sup>Gordon W. Bigelow, Rhetoric and American Poetry of the Early National Period ("University of Florida Monographs," No. 4; Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1960).

<sup>92</sup>R. S. Crane, ed., Critics and Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952).

<sup>93</sup>David Daiches, Critical Approaches to Literature (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1956).

<sup>94</sup>See Wilber S. Howell, "Literature as an Enterprise in Communication," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXXIII (December, 1947), 417-26; Roland Mushat Frye, "Rhetoric and Poetry in Julius Caesar," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXXVII (February, 1951), 41-48.

of approaches to the criticism of literature, Frye says, "I hope some sense has been communicated of what folly it would be to try to exclude any of these groups from criticism,"<sup>95</sup> and the entire group would accept that it is accurate to say:

These three uses of language--the practical, the literary, the hortatory--are not sharply divided. They may be thought of as three points of a triangle; most actual specimens of written language fall somewhere within the triangle.<sup>96</sup>

This is not to suggest that varied emphases cannot result in extremes of difference in the use of language, that Keats' "To Autumn" is not markedly different from Theodore Roosevelt's "The Man with the Muckrake," but when we begin to consider the rhetorical and poetical stress in these works, it appears that a relative and pluralistic system of analysis would provide the most meaningful results. This assumption will be explored in all subsequent essays of this study.

In order to point up the nature of the alliance between rhetoric and poetic, the essay immediately following will contain a sketch of some of the historical background. This sketch will be used as a point of departure in structuring a methodology for discussing the relationships between rhetoric and poetic, a methodology based upon relative and pluralistic standards. Standards will be developed in six areas: (1) creator; (2) purpose; (3) subject; (4) form; (5) authorial presence; and (6) mode.

In the next essay these areas will be described on a more limited basis. Since the focal point for the study is the 1855 edition of Leaves

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<sup>95</sup>Northrup Frye, p. 341.

<sup>96</sup>Laurence Perrine, Sound and Sense an Introduction to Poetry (2nd ed; New York: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., 1963), p. 4, n. 1.

of Grass, the discussion must employ standards that reflect theory and practice of that era, and the descriptions will grow out of a preliminary examination of theory and practice in rhetoric and poetic, in America during the first half of the nineteenth century.

The standards from that period will be used in the fourth essay as a framework for the discussion of Walt Whitman and his poetry, and the final essay of the study will be devoted to summary and conclusions.

It should be noted here that the emphasis upon the first edition of Leaves of Grass is not an arbitrary one. Although there is no unanimity on the point, a number of critics feel that the 1855 edition represents Whitman at his best.<sup>97</sup> Aside from the question of literary merit, there is near unanimity, for it is agreed that the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass constitutes a true revolution in American letters, if not in all of literature. Also, it has been demonstrated that Whitman became increasingly more conventional in matters of subject and form in later editions,<sup>98</sup> and the attempt to encompass this evolution is beyond the scope of the present study.

The first edition provides sufficient breadth both for testing the proposed methodology and for determining any possible indebtedness to rhetorical theory and practice. This limitation does not mean that

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<sup>97</sup>See Catel, Rythme et Langage and Walt Whitman; Richard Chase, Walt Whitman ("University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers," No. 9; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1961), pp. 15-16, 36-37; and Allen writes, "Most critics will have to agree, too, that in the first edition we have Whitman at his freshest in vision and boldest in language," Man, Poet, and Legend, p. 47. But cf. James E. Miller, Walt Whitman (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1962), p. 76.

<sup>98</sup>Asselineau, The Creation of a Book. Contains general discussion of this trend within later editions of Leaves of Grass.

evidence will be sought only in the years before 1855. On the contrary, some of the most illuminating material is to be found after that date, particularly in statements from Whitman himself. Furthermore, some limited comparisons with later editions may prove instructive.



## DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN RHETORIC AND POETIC

In his study of Greek rhetoric and literary criticism, W. Rhys Roberts observes that in no literature "can prose be studied and appraised apart from verse,"<sup>99</sup> and he alludes in this distinction to the separation between rhetoric and poetic. Although some have sought to force these two modes into discrete categories, Roberts' approach is not novel, for it has become commonplace to note the entangling alliance which has existed between rhetoric and poetic throughout most of Western history,<sup>100</sup> but it will be useful to trace some of the background materials which bear upon the intertwining relationships between rhetoric and poetic.

An intimate alliance is evident in antiquity, for even C. S. Baldwin, who attempts to distinguish between rhetoric and poetic by the pattern of composition,<sup>101</sup> is forced to admit that Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics are witnesses "to a division oftener implied in ancient criticism than stated explicitly."<sup>102</sup> Aristotle made but few cross-references between the two critical treatises, but those references and the implications elsewhere are crucial. That the discussions of style

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<sup>99</sup>W. Rhys Roberts, Greek Rhetoric and Literary Criticism (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1928), p. 3.

<sup>100</sup>See Bigelow, Rhetoric and American Poetry; Bryant, "Rhetoric: Its Functions;" and Theodore G. Burgess, Epideictic Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1902).

<sup>101</sup>Charles S. Baldwin, Ancient Rhetoric and Poetic (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1924), p. 224.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

are interdependent is manifest,<sup>103</sup> and it is equally obvious that there are other closely related considerations. Those sections of the *Poetics* which treat of action and character--factors of utmost importance in the Aristotelean definition of tragedy<sup>104</sup>--must be examined together with the doctrines of proof and emotions which are detailed in the *Rhetoric*.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, Aristotle felt that the conceptions of action and character were both revealed and reinforced by thought, and he wrote:

As for the Thought, we may assume what is said of it in our Art of Rhetoric, as it belongs more properly to that department of inquiry. The Thought of the personages shown in everything to be effected by their language--in every effort to prove or disprove, to arouse emotion (pity, fear, anger, and the like), or to maximise or minimize things. It is clear, also, that their mental procedure must be on the same lines in their actions likewise, whenever they wish them to arouse pity or horror, or to have the look of importance or probability.<sup>106</sup>

This statement indicates that Aristotle was thinking of his detailed examination of pity and fear which is to be found in the *Rhetoric*,<sup>107</sup> and of the concept of probability which is the heart of the Aristotelean system of proof;<sup>108</sup> consequently, for Aristotle, if one is to understand the nature and impact of tragedy, he must understand the nature and impact of rhetoric. The converse is equally true, and this situation

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<sup>103</sup>Aristotle *Rhetoric* iii; *Poetics* 19ff.

<sup>104</sup>Aristotle *Poetics* 5, 1450<sup>a</sup>-18, 1456<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>105</sup>Aristotle *Rhetoric* ii, 2-17.

<sup>106</sup>Aristotle *Poetics*, trans. Ingram Bywater, *The Rhetoric and the Poetics of Aristotle*, ed. Friedrich Solmsen (New York: Random House, 1954), 18-19. This translation used throughout.

<sup>107</sup>Aristotle *Rhetoric* ii. 5, 8.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*, i. 2.



quite naturally blurs distinctions between rhetoric and poetic.<sup>109</sup>

Further evidence from antiquity of the blurred distinctions between rhetoric and poetic can be found by looking to the examples which almost all writers use in their discussions of language. There is a regular and easy use of illustrations from any source--oration, play or poem--it matters little so long as the example seems to offer appropriate demonstration for the point being considered,<sup>110</sup> and the writers are simply not concerned about drawing any lines of demarcation. The attitude is not too surprising, for as J. W. H. Atkins points out, the study of poetic was a sort of by-product of studies in "philosophy, rhetoric, grammar, and the like,"<sup>111</sup> and he adds:

Most of the critical works were devoted probably to oratory or rhetoric, though a host of writings on poets and poetry has doubtless been lost; and in the later treatment of poetry the influence of rhetorical studies is clearly seen.<sup>112</sup>

Studies by M. L. Clarke<sup>113</sup> and Donald L. Clark<sup>114</sup> demonstrate the effects of the rhetorical inheritance to which Atkins alludes, and as Friedrich Solmsen says:

. . .for many centuries. . . the discussion of poetic diction was dominated by the criteria of good and bad style which Aristotle had established in the Rhetoric; as for the character

<sup>109</sup>See A. W. Staub, "Rhetoric and Poetic: The Rhetor as Poet-Plot-Maker," Southern Speech Journal: XVII (Summer, 1961), . 285-90.

<sup>110</sup>Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics; Longinus On the Sublime; Rhetorica Ad Herennium.

<sup>111</sup>J. W. H. Atkins, Literary Criticism in Antiquity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934), I, 5.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>113</sup>M. L. Clarke, Rhetoric at Rome (London: Cohen and West Ltd., 1953).

<sup>114</sup>Donald L. Clark, Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957).

sketches, we find them as early as Horace bodily transferred from Rhetoric to Poetics. Moreover, what happened in these instances happened also in others; later writers on poetry used the Rhetoric as a quarry, furnishing many a stone for their edifice which, while standing firm on the foundations of Aristotle's Poetics, could yet do with a good deal of filling out in other parts of its structure.<sup>115</sup>

The burgeoning of scholarship in the Renaissance saw little change in attitude regarding the accepted association between rhetoric and poetic; in fact, there was even more confusion in some "filling out" of the structure. Spingarn points out that poetry became a part of logic and that the enthymeme and example became the instruments of poetry.<sup>116</sup> Commentators on the Poetics--such as Robortello, in 1548,<sup>117</sup> and Castelvetro, in 1571,<sup>118</sup> carried the influence of rhetoric so far that Bernard Weinberg says:

. . . the effect produced is no longer one of artistic pleasure resulting from the formal qualities of the work, but one of moral persuasion to action or inaction, in which the pleasure involved is merely an accompaniment or an instrument.<sup>119</sup>

Weinberg cites the rhetorical tradition as the general cause in the creating of this situation; he points specifically to the rhetorical tenor of Horace's Ars Poetica as the most important factor in Robortello's having been led astray, and concludes:

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<sup>115</sup>Solmsen, pp. xiii-xiv.

<sup>116</sup>J. E. Spingarn, Literary Criticism in the Renaissance (New York: Columbia University Press, 1924), pp. 24-25.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., pp. 16-23 et passim.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid. For translation see Literary Criticism Plato to Dryden, ed. Allan H. Gilbert (New York: American Book Co., 1940), pp. 304-57.

<sup>119</sup>Bernard Weinberg, "Robortello on the Poetics," Critics and Criticism, ed. Crane, pp. 346-47.

Unfortunately, this will be the procedure for all of Robertello's successors and will account for the progressive transformation and deformation of the idea of poetry contained in the Poetics.<sup>120</sup>

Ignoring the value judgements in Weinberg's analysis, his statement is accurate in depicting the impact which rhetoric had upon poetic theory, and theorists such as Scaliger, Boileau, Rapin, and Sidney are but a few of the many who evidence a rhetorical bias in their theories of poetry. Beyond the criteria for diction of the delineation or character, this bias is most readily observed, as Weinberg suggests, in a pre-occupation with the didactic--the insistence that the poet must teach, must inculcate morals and morality. Sidney went so far as to conclude that the poet is a teacher who is superior to both historian and philosopher, saying:

By these, therefore, examples and reasons, I think it may be manifest that the poet, with the same hand of delight, doth draw the mind more effectually than any other art doth. And so a conclusion not unfitly ensueth, that, as virtue is the most excellent resting place for all worldly learning to make his end of, so poetry, being the most familiar to teach it and most princely to move towards it, in the most excellent work is the most excellent workman.<sup>121</sup>

Rapin said that eloquence was often less successful than poetry in persuading men to virtue "because Men are more sensible and sooner impress'd upon by what is Pleasant, than by Reason,"<sup>122</sup> and John Dennis presented the extreme of didacticism in his observation:

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<sup>120</sup>Ibid., p. 348.

<sup>121</sup>Sir Philip Sidney, The Defense of Poesie, Literary Criticism, ed. Gilbert, p. 430.

<sup>122</sup>Rene Rapin, The Whole Critical Works of Monsieur Rapin, trans. Basil Kennet and others (London: 1716), I, 143.

Every legitimate dramatic poem either of the comic or tragic kind, is not a mere diversion. . . but a philosophical and moral lecture, in which the poet is teacher and the spectators are his disciples.<sup>123</sup>

In his examination of Renaissance theories of comedy, Marvin Herrick discovered the same rhetorical orientation, and he reports that most theorists stressed "the didactic function of comedy which mirrors everyday life and so teaches us what is useful and what must be avoided."<sup>124</sup> Thus, whether we turn to tragedy or to comedy, we find a strong rhetorical overlay operative in poetic theory, an overlay which tends to blur distinctions and to merge rhetoric and poetic.

The theoretical basis for merging the two modes had received added impetus from the schools in Rome. With the end of the Republic, rhetoric "lost touch with real life and became an independent self-centered activity,"<sup>125</sup> and this is nowhere more evident than in the declamatio. The declamations often degenerated into displays of stylistic virtuosity,<sup>126</sup> and "there grew up the public declamation, aimed not at practice but at display, given by a professional rhetorician."<sup>127</sup> Similarly, the progymnasmata of the grammar schools provided practice in developing set

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<sup>123</sup>John Dennis, The Critical Works of John Dennis, ed. Edward N. Hooker (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1943), II, 308.

<sup>124</sup>Marvin T. Herrick, Comic Theory in the Sixteenth Century ("Illinois Studies in Language and Literature," XXXIV, 1-2; Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1950), . 166. Cf. Rapin, I, 219.

<sup>125</sup>Clarke, p. 85.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid, pp. 85-99.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., p. 88, Cf. Clark, pp. 213-61.

themes.<sup>128</sup> This activity encouraged "descriptive dilation for its own sake," and became "a literary form that delighted audiences with epideictic word-painting."<sup>129</sup> Rhetoric and rhetoricians have borne the odium which has become attached to this rhetoric of style, but after granting that the cataloguing of rhetorical devices was carried to extremes and admitting that their use can become decadent decoration, Kenneth Burke argues that "even the most ostentatious of them arose out of great functional urgency,"<sup>130</sup> and discussing the formal appeal of these devices, he says, "Their universal nature makes it particularly easy to shift them from rhetoric to poetic."<sup>131</sup> The shifting which took place was as much the responsibility of the grammaticus and the poetical theorist, for they were as influential as the rhetorician in nurturing a particular attention to style and the resultant alliance between rhetoric and poetic.<sup>132</sup>

But whatever the causal factors, the practice of making an amalgam of rhetoric and poetic lasted through the Medieval period and beyond. Both Greek and Latin translations of the progymnasmata continued to be favorite exercises on into the seventeenth century,<sup>133</sup> and if the

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<sup>128</sup>Clark, p. 177-212.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>130</sup>Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1950), p. 66.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>132</sup>Cf. Burgess, Epideictic Literature.

<sup>133</sup>Donald L. Clark, "The Rise and Fall of Progymnasmata in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Grammar Schools," Speech Monographs, XIX (November, 1952), pp. 259-63; Aphthonius, Progymnasmata, trans. Ray Nadeau, Speech Monographs, XIX (November, 1952), pp. 264-85.



curricula of the Renaissance grammar school included the study of plays, epistles, orations, and poetry, the primary emphasis was upon the limitation of the best models, regardless of the genre.<sup>134</sup> Theoretical support for this emphasis was to be found in Cicero's works and in the Rhetorica ad Herennium, for these treatises gave both doctrinal and spatial stress to matters of style.

With style the be all and end all, the blending or separating of rhetoric and poetic constituted no real problem, as is well illustrated in the long debate over Ciceronianism. The polemic lasted on into the Renaissance and was to involve such people as Erasmus, Scaliger, and Ramus.<sup>135</sup> The issues involved the excellence of Cicero as a stylist and as a model for imitation in composition, and no one stopped to consider that there might be differences between rhetoric and poetic. The issue did not arise. It did not arise because of the degree of amalgamation by this time, and the significance of the situation is pointed up by Paul O. Kristeller when he says:

I merely want to point out that Renaissance humanism must be understood as a characteristic phase in what may be called the rhetorical tradition in Western culture. This tradition is as old as the Greek Sophists, and it is very much alive in our own day, although the word "rhetoric" has become distasteful to many people. For the studies of speech and composition. . . are nothing but modern varieties of the age old rhetorical enterprise that tries to teach oral and written expression by means of rules and models.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup>Paul Abelson, The Seven Liberal Arts ("Columbia University Teachers College Contributions to Education," No. 11; New York: Columbia University Press, 1906).

<sup>135</sup>Izora Scott, Controversies over the Imitation of Cicero as a Model for Style ("Columbia University Teachers College Contributions to Education," No. 35; New York: Columbia University Press, 1910).

<sup>136</sup>Paul O. Kristeller, The Classics and Renaissance Thought (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1955), p. 11.

Although Kristeller argues that humanism stemmed from the rhetorical tradition, transformations were taking place which were to radically alter that tradition. Critical thought was on the move, and the movement was to eventuate in important theoretical changes during the eighteenth century. Referring to the latter period, W. J. Bate says:

Many of the assumptions which had underlain ideas of art in classical antiquity and in the Renaissance were gradually supplanted at this time by more individualistic and psychological conceptions of art and taste; and these conceptions, under various names, have largely dominated our thinking about art to the present day.<sup>137</sup>

Supplanted was the doctrinaire adherence to rules which had long been accepted as the basis of all creative effort in linguistic art. Longinus was master, and as Samuel H. Monk observes:

Longinus's declaration that the sublime lay beyond the reach of rules prepared the way for the alignment of the sublime on the side of original genius. It was a mere matter of deduction from this premise.<sup>138</sup> to the conviction that the rules were inimical to great art.

To this same point, Bate adds that "writers who exhorted the authority of Longinus more frequently did so with the purpose of disparaging the rules."<sup>139</sup>

Freed from the older critical dicta, literature and all art pushed forward to the Romantic Movement, with rhetoric and poetic heading for separate compartments. Of course, the severance had never been complete and absolute, for both modes must rely ultimately upon language as a base. This fact alone is enough to complicate any attempt at differentia-

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<sup>137</sup>Walter Jackson Bate, From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth-Century England (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), p. vii.

<sup>138</sup>Samuel H. Monk, The Sublime (Ann Arbor Paperbacks; Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1960), p. 235.

<sup>139</sup>Bate, p. 47.

tion, even if history did not show a consistent overlapping.

Despite the nature of the inter-relationships between rhetoric and poetic—sometimes because of them—differentiation between the modes has been essayed, but in his approach to this problem, Gordon Bigelow indicates the shortcomings of most attempts, saying:

This long and close association of rhetoric and poetic renders any attempt to distinguish between them unusually difficult. Past attempts to define these two great modes of discourse and to discriminate between them have never been satisfactory for two chief reasons. First, critics have assumed that there are such things as "pure" rhetoric and "pure" poetry, whereas in practice there are few if any speeches which are not in some way poetic, or poems which are not in some way rhetorical. Second, critics have too often tried to capture the whole essence of a mode in a single definition and to oppose it to the whole essence of another mode without being aware that these modes are not simple but complex in nature, that they defy epitomization as wholes, and that they cannot be made mutually exclusive except on a special basis. For this reason most attempts to distinguish between the modes have screened out only certain classes of poems or speeches and have let others fall through the sieve.<sup>140</sup>

After citing as an example of the latter limitation John Stuart Mills's familiar distinction, "eloquence is heard; poetry is overheard," Bigelow goes on to describe a different line of attack, one which includes the following innovations:

First, an assumption that absolute or categorical distinctions between the two modes cannot be made, but that the only real distinctions are relative ones—those of degree or emphasis; second, that ordinarily no single distinction will serve, but that in each case a number of distinctions must be sought on various levels.<sup>141</sup>

The same assumptions underlie the critical framework which will be employed in discussing Walt Whitman's relationship to the rhetorical tradition, and six criteria will be utilized: (1) creator, (2) purpose,

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<sup>140</sup>Bigelow, p. 2.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., p. 3.



(3) subject, (4) form, (5) authorial presence, and (6) mode. These criteria stem from an analysis of any linguistic act which has the purpose of communication, for in such acts, someone expresses himself in language about something, and he does so with some purpose, but not every discernable element of the communicative situation can be used to determine poetic or rhetorical stress. The criteria chosen here appear to be the most meaningful in this respect, and they include the someone (creator), whatever it is that he is talking about (subject), his goal (purpose), and the linguistic pattern (form) in which the communication is presented. The degree to which the creator enters into the communication as a direct participant (authorial presence) and the impact of this participating personality (mode) are also included because they are factors in all communication but have traditional associations with rhetorical emphasis. There is no mention of audience because it is implied throughout, and each of the descriptions which follows must reflect the mind of the audience whether it be made up of critics or the general public. Moreover the awareness of the communicator and the effect of his personality are direct functions of an audience and its reaction, something which will become more apparent when authorial presence and mode are discussed. Thus the audience is included by definition, and it enters as a most important factor in the last two criteria, and although there is no intention of slighting the role of the audience, there will be no separate discussion devoted to this aspect of communication. Some further qualifications are also in order before we turn to a more detailed examination of the six criteria which will be described.

These criteria will be established to provide a basis for the discussion of the relationships between rhetoric and poetic, but as the standards are developed, it must be remembered that there will be some

overlapping of categories because it is impossible to divide the complex phenomenon of language use into discrete segments. Moreover, the criteria for analysis must be recognized as relative standards; one may prove more fruitful than another, but to attempt to make that one serve as an absolute category would be to defeat a fundamental purpose of the entire approach. It must also be remembered that the critical system to be established will be created for the purpose of accomplishing a descriptive analysis rather than with a goal of evaluation. The intention here is to fashion a method which will illuminate the relationships between rhetoric and poetic, and which will then be utilized in determining the position of Whitman and his poetry in regard to those relationships.

Creator. The ancient commonplace, poeta nascitur; orator fit, which distinguishes between rhetoric and poetic in terms of the creative talent at work, was used in antiquity, and it has had some currency ever since. According to this standard, the poet is a man of genius; his creative efforts flow from the inspired stimulation and application of an inborn talent. The same view may grant the rhetor a degree of natural talent, but the systematic application of rules is seen as the most important factor; it is assumed that even an inferior talent can achieve some measure of success through an adherence to the rules. In Rapin's words:

One may be an Orator without the natural Gift of Eloquence, because Art may supply that Defect; but no Man can be a Poet without a Genius: The Want of which, no Art or Industry is capable to repair.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>142</sup>Rapin, I, 139.

In the words used to describe those who attempt to write poetry we find some linguistic evidence of the basic attitude here. We normally imply excellence when we label someone as a poet; we customarily indicate mediocrity with terms such as versifier, poetaster, or rhymester. There are some terms which have been used to differentiate quality in rhetoric, but nothing exists which approximates the hierarchy expressed in the labels attached to those who would be poets, and this is indicative of the belief that the true poet is one of exceptional talent.

It is true that almost all rhetorical theorists have made some obeisance toward the need for innate ability, Quintillian expressing the typical attitude with the observation: "We cannot hope to attain perfection unless nature is assisted by study. But I will not be so obstinate as to deny that to nature must be assigned the first place."<sup>143</sup> This gesture in the direction of native talent cannot alter the fact that rhetoricians have always found footing on the grounds that "the subject can plainly be handled systematically,"<sup>144</sup> and Kenneth Burke, commenting upon the Rhetoric, says that Aristotle:

. . . gives what amounts to a handbook on a manly art of self-defense. He describes the holds and the counterholds, the blows and the ways of blocking them, for every means of persuasion the corresponding means of dissuasion, for every proof the disproof, for every praise the virtuperation that matches it.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup>Quintilian, Institutio Oratoria, trans. H. E. Butler (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958) xi.3.11.

<sup>144</sup>Aristotle Rhetoric, trans. W. Rhys Roberts, Aristotle, ed. Solmsen, i.1. 1354<sup>a</sup>8-9.

<sup>145</sup>Burke, p. 52.

Of course a systematic treatment characterizes the Poetics, but Aristotle regarded poetry as "an inspired thing,"<sup>146</sup> and felt that some touch of genius was required in the poet.<sup>147</sup> On the other hand, there is little room for inspiration in most of the rhetorical treatises which have survived from antiquity. Most are notable for the exhaustive analyses of the positions of argument, the topics or tropes and figures, and such catalogues were intended to include all possibilities. The smack of the mechanical cannot be avoided. Burke suggests that the minute analysis of tropes and figures led to a universality of categories which enabled Longinus to consider "'sublimity' of effect in and for itself."<sup>148</sup> Yet Longinus placed greatest stress upon the natural endowments of the creator, for he felt that the most important factors in the attainment of stylistic excellence were inborn qualities. On his view there are five principal sources of this excellence:

First and most important is the power of forming great conceptions. . . . Secondly, there is vehement and inspired passion. These two components of the sublime are for the most part innate. Those which remain are partly the product of art. The due formation of figures deals with two sorts of figures. . . . Next there is noble diction. . . . The fifth cause. . . is dignified and elevated composition.<sup>149</sup>

The Longinian position is most significant for the present discussion because On the Sublime was to provide a basis for the rejection of the rules. The last three sources of stylistic excellence—those which

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<sup>146</sup>Aristotle Rhetoric iii. 7. 1508<sup>a</sup>19.

<sup>147</sup>Aristotle Poetics 17. 1455<sup>a</sup>30-35.

<sup>148</sup>Burke, p. 65.

<sup>149</sup>Longinus, On the Sublime, trans. W. Rhys Roberts, The Great Critics, ed. James H. Smith and W. W. Farks (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1939), viii.

were the products of art—came to be ignored,<sup>150</sup> and as Monk notes in reference to the inborn qualities:

These are the gift of nature, and cannot be attained through the technique of rhetoric. And it was on these two sources that the eighteenth century was to fix its attention. The emphasis on great thought led Longinus and his followers into a consideration of the mind that creates the work of art: the emphasis on emotion, in the hands of English critics, developed into the study of the effect of a work on the perceiving mind. . . . once the sublime was isolated as a quality of art, having its source in the mind of the artist and arousing an intense emotion in the mind of the reader or spectator, emphasis naturally tended to center on the first two sources which were considered to be independent of and even to transcend artistic skill.<sup>151</sup>

Monk's entire study serves to demonstrate the thesis that the concept of the sublime came to be more and more closely associated with imaginative literature, and this same tendency enhanced the belief that the true creative artist—the poet—is one inspired. Meanwhile, the rhetorician was left with the bundle of standard rules, and we find Lord Kames writing in the eighteenth century that poetry requires a "peculiar genius," but for prose, "practice is necessary more than genius."<sup>152</sup>

This attitude toward the creator of the linguistic act can serve as a standard in the examination of the relationships between rhetoric and poetic. Normally a somewhat subjective criterion which is employed in evaluation, the very character of such evaluation can illuminate the rhetoric-poetic alliance at a given time, and in the present study, the nature of this alliance must be established as it existed in America during the first half of the nineteenth century. When we turn to that task in the next essay, theory and criticism must provide the basic

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<sup>150</sup>Monk, pp. 1-28 et passim.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid., pp. 13-14.

<sup>152</sup>Henry Home, Lord Kames, Elements of Criticism (New York: Collins & Hannay, 1830), p. 274.



materials for the structuring of this criterion, for despite any invocation to the Muse, or any stock admission of inadequacy, poems and speeches cannot tell us the role which was assigned to the creator. We must turn to the dicta of the theorists and the evaluations of the critics, and in so doing we can discover the status of our commonplace, poeta nascitur; orator fit.

Purpose. To what purpose does a man write or speak? The answer to this question has given birth to critical treatises throughout history, and if differences in philosophy have made for some variety in the answers, areas of agreement can be discerned. Thus to Plato rhetoric was suspect; Aristotle saw it as a neutral tool, saying, "What makes a man a 'sophist' is not his faculty, but his moral purpose,"<sup>153</sup> but both men agreed that persuasion was the hall mark of rhetoric. Aristotle seized upon the persuasive element in his defense of rhetoric, arguing that the art made truth prevail, assisted with the intractable audience, clarified issues, and provided for self-defense.<sup>154</sup> Most theorists have followed this tack; the emphasis has been upon persuasion, and much less attention has been accorded informative speaking. Informative discourse is treated by implication in the Rhetoric, but Aristotle's system is persuasion centered, and it was not until the growth of interest in faculty psychology that a variety of purposes became truly important in rhetorical theory.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup>Aristotle Rhetoric i. 1. 1355<sup>a</sup>16-17.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., 1355<sup>a-b</sup>.

<sup>155</sup>For discussion see Douglas W. Ehninger, "George Campbell and the Revolution in Intentional Theory," Southern Speech Journal, XV (May, 1950), 270-76.



Even then persuasion remained the dominant concern, for although theorists such as Bacon and Campbell record that enlightening the understanding is a step on the path to the moving of the will, they feel that moving the will is the ultimate and most important movement.<sup>156</sup> Psychology has moved far from the early formulations, but rhetoric is still most involved with theories of persuasion. This has not been altered by the awareness that in the right situation the mere conveying of information can be enough to make men act; nor has it been altered by the ever growing importance of the need to simply communicate information, for speculation about the moving of men to belief and action has an inherent appeal that is not to be found in speculation about the apparently bare transfer of information.

An excellent illustration of the dominant attitude is to be found in Donald C. Bryant's illuminating discussion, for he concludes:

Rhetoric is the rationale of informative and suasory discourse, it operates chiefly in the areas of the contingent, its aim is the attainment of maximum probability as a basis for public decision, it is the organizing and animating principle of all subject-matters which have a relevant bearing on that decision.<sup>157</sup>

Both informative and suasory discourse are included, but the latter immediately becomes more central as the attainment of probability in the area of the contingent becomes the final goal. The approach is typical. Rhetoric has been damned as immoral, defended as amoral, and championed as the savior of free societies, but the most compelling attraction has

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<sup>156</sup>George Campbell, The Philosophy of Rhetoric (Edinburgh: George Ramsay & Co., 1808). Campbell is obviously most interested in the end of speaking which is, "... the most complex of all, which is calculated to influence the will, and persuade to a certain conduct." p. 27.

<sup>157</sup>Bryant, p. 408.

always been found to reside somewhere in the regions of Aristotle's "discovery of the available means of persuasion." At the same time, we must remember that the oratory of display has always lurked on the periphery of rhetorical theory and practice.

Sometimes a response to political restrictions upon free and open discussion--such was the case in Rome after the Republic--and sometimes the result of the natural bent of epideictic oratory, the oratory of display has always maintained some degree of popularity, and it has often been near the mid-point in the rhetoric-poetic continuum.<sup>158</sup> Critics have regularly applied purely literary standards to critiques of rhetoric,<sup>159</sup> and the oratory of display has been an important factor encouraging such criticism. Other factors have been operative, to be sure, but when public speaking is dissociated from informative and suasive intent, the product is then logically submitted to a critical focus upon performance per se, and the goal is often the pleasure associated with the literary quality of the speech.

Moving to the function of poetry, we find even less general agreement as to fundamental purpose. Poetry has been explained in terms of the poet's adjustment to his psychological motivation,<sup>160</sup> as the unique formal rendering of the materials selected,<sup>161</sup> and as a psychologically

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<sup>158</sup>Burgess, esp. pp. 166-95.

<sup>159</sup>Herbert A. Wichelns, "The Literary Criticism of Oratory," Studies in Rhetoric and Public Speaking in Honor of James A. Winans (New York: Century Co., 1925), pp. 161-216.

<sup>160</sup>Sigmund Freud, Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, trans. Joan Riviere (London: Hogarth, 1922).

<sup>161</sup>Cleanth Brooks, The Well Wrought Urn (Harvest Books; New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., n. d.).

satisfying substitute for action.<sup>162</sup> These explanations stress the role of the creator and do not focus upon the reaction of the audience, but when we turn to theories which take the audience into consideration we find that the conception of the poet as persuader is hardly foreign to the history of literary criticism. Plato insisted upon the didactic purpose, and we have seen earlier in this essay some results of Horace's dictum, "The poet's aim is either to profit or to please, or to blend in one the delightful and the useful."<sup>163</sup>

It is interesting that the didactic function is often blended with the pleasure afforded by poetry, with Sidney and others arguing that poetry is the great teacher precisely because of the great pleasure. The critical emphasis can and does fall upon the idea that the poet should please, and this leads back to the Poetics of Aristotle, and forward to the innumerable discussions of katharsis and imitation.<sup>164</sup> Aristotle's reply to Plato's attack upon poetry sought a measure of defense on the grounds that poetry provides a special kind of pleasure. This can be extended to include a special kind of knowledge, for as David Daiches notes in his discussion of the theoretical possibilities which lie within the Aristotelean framework:

On this view a literary work becomes in the last analysis a form of knowledge, a unique way of presenting a kind of insight

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<sup>162</sup>Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form (Rev. ed.; New York: Vintage Books, 1957); A Grammar of Motives (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1945); and Rhetoric of Motives.

<sup>163</sup>Horace, The Art of Poetry, trans. Edward H. Blakeney, Literary Criticism, ed. Gilbert, 333.

<sup>164</sup>See discussion by Lane Cooper, The Poetics of Aristotle Its Meaning and Influence (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Press, 1923), pp. 86-148.

into a phase of the human situation which cannot be expressed or communicated in any other way.<sup>165</sup>

This epistimological interpretation is countered by the imitation which Dr. Johnson describes in his Preface to Shakespeare, for that imitation suggests a copying:

Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature. Particular manners can be known to few, and therefore few only can judge how nearly they are recopied. The irregular combination of fanciful invention may delight a while, by that novelty of which the common satiety of life sends us all in quest; but the pleasures of sudden wonder are soon exhausted, and the mind can only repose on the stability of truth.<sup>166</sup>

In his most famous of all English commentaries on the Poetics, S. H. Butcher adheres to the notion of imitation, but he moves in the realm suggested in Daiches' statement above saying:

Imitative art in its highest form, namely poetry, is an expression of the universal element in human life. . . fine art eliminates what is transient and particular and reveals the permanent and essential features of the original.<sup>167</sup>

But the eventual goal for this ideal representation is not instruction or persuasion, Butcher contending:

For the grown man the poet's function is not that of teacher, or if a teacher, he is so only by accident. The object of poetry, as of all the fine arts, is to produce an emotional delight, a pure and elevated pleasure.<sup>168</sup>

Any anthology of literary criticism or aesthetic theory will reveal an even wider range than is suggested in this brief survey, but the

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<sup>165</sup>Daiches, Critical Approaches, p. 38.

<sup>166</sup>Samuel Johnson, "Preface," The Plays of Shakespeare (London: 1773), facing page A3 .

<sup>167</sup>S. H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art (4th ed.; New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1951), p. 150. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>168</sup>Ibid., p. 221.

important thing to note is the fact that the critics have stressed more and more the peculiar pleasure which attaches to poetry. The critical revolution which raised the standard of Longinus stifled the demand for didacticism in poetry; the enthusiastic acceptance of the poet as genius fostered the concomitant acceptance of the product which the genius produced. Genius is its own excuse for expression. Here we find the basis for the criterion of purpose. The stress upon pleasure or upon expressionism will be taken to mean a poetic bias; stress upon the didactic or suasive function will indicate the rhetorical.

It can be argued that any communication which gains attention thereby has some persuasive effect; so also, any communication can be subjected to a formal aesthetic analysis which disregards any suasive impact, but we need not throw up our hands in dismay. It would be absurd to maintain that the reader cannot differentiate between rhetorical purpose in Theodore Roosevelt's "The Man with the Muckrake" and John Keats' "To Autumn." Is "On His Blindness" a persuasive or didactic poem? "Annabel Lee?" Can anyone read Webster's "Reply to Hayne" and doubt the persuasive intent? The Lincoln-Douglas debates? The examples may be extreme, and the mid-point of the continuum will necessarily involve some problems. The other criteria will assist here, not only by providing additional lines of attack, but also by giving further insight within the scope of purpose, for the subject, authorial presence, and the mode employed by the creator can shed light upon intent.

Evidence under the criterion of purpose must be sought first in the materials which make up the communicative act; the words of the creator will be the best source of information regarding intent. At the same time, critical opinion must be examined, for just as the criticism of a period will reveal the status of poet or speaker, so it will also explain the accepted goals in poetry or rhetoric.



Subject. An excellent point of departure for the discussion of this criterion is to be found in a recent study of poetry where the authors remark:

Perhaps the most widespread misconception about poems is the belief that they must be written about "poetic" subjects. According to the view poetic subjects must be pleasant--love, nature, beauty; unpleasant subjects are unpoetic and are therefore unsuited to poems. . . . Actually there are no limitations on the suitability of subjects for poems, for there are good poems on almost every conceivable subject. A poet is as free to write about a rusty automobile radiator as about a sunset.<sup>169</sup>

There is a degree of confusion in this argument, but in tracing out this confusion, we can more directly attack the problem of establishing the criterion of subject. It is obvious that the writers have not limited themselves to subject matter alone but have moved into an evaluation of the manner in which the subject is developed because there is nothing necessarily pleasant about nature or love, for example. What they might have said is:

According to the traditional theory, art is the creation and the contemplation of beauty. The artist expresses positive values, or negative values only if they somehow heighten our sense of the positive. All discords in art, it is maintained, must be resolved into harmonies. An artist who remains steadfastly true to his artistic function can never tell his troubles unless the effect is to create beauty.<sup>170</sup>

Some contemporary aestheticians and literary critics equate beauty with successful expression, but as Rader's statement indicates, the tradition has stressed the pleasant, positive expression. The tradition is pertinent to the present discussion because the attitude leads directly to a limitation in the choice of subject. Try as he may, the poet will face

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<sup>169</sup>C. F. Main and Peter J. Seng, eds., Poems (San Francisco: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1961), p. 24.

<sup>170</sup>Melvin Rader, ed., A Modern Book of Esthetics (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1935), pp. xvii-xviii.



difficulties in finding positive values on every side, and the tradition may well force him to ignore any negative values. Thus censorship can arise, as indeed it did during the Victorian era when certain realities of life just were not to be mentioned in polite letters. In a day when Robert Graves' "Down, Wanton, Down" appears in anthologies, and when we encounter poems which treat of the Federal Trade Commission,<sup>171</sup> we may forget the restrictions which polite convention has imposed. It is no accident that so much poetry has been devoted to romantic love, religious experience, and heroism. Moreover, even in the absence of critical prohibitions poetic conventions have encouraged a turning to pleasant thoughts of nature, grand love affairs, or triumphant military adventures. By definition, the true genius will seek out the subjects which convention approves; if he does not, he will lose his status as genius.<sup>172</sup>

All of this is not to imply that the rhetorician cannot face some conventional limitations or that he never avoids reality. Yet the press of the exigencies in the speaking situation are likely to demand that the speaker choose a subject which is an essential part of that very situation. The speaker may employ euphemisms, or he may attempt to circumvent an immediate problem, but eventually the real problems must be discussed whether they be prostitution, medical care for the aged, the location of the new shopping center, or the advisability of permitting high school libraries to shelve the Dictionary of American Slang. These and related subjects tend to fall within the categories which Aristotle listed for deliberative speaking--ways and means, war and peace, national defense,

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<sup>171</sup>Josephine Miles, "Government Injunction Restraining Harlem Cosmetic Company," Poems, ed. Main and Seng, p. 193.

<sup>172</sup>Kames, pp. 297, 377-78.

imports and exports, and legislation.<sup>173</sup> Subjects here and in forensic speaking are likely to involve controversy, policy commitments, and the search for value systems, developments which have normally fallen outside the domain of the poet. With Aristotle's third type of speaking, epideictic oratory, we come to the broad area of praise and blame, and as has been indicated earlier, this is the area where rhetoric and poetic are inclined to blend. A further complication exists, at least in the poetry of the twentieth century, because the poet has cast aside most of the traditional prescriptions which have related to the choice of subject, but the criterion of subject can be useful in probing the relationships between rhetoric and poetic. Those topics which fall within the area of the contingent and involve controversy and the search for probability will customarily indicate a rhetorical bias; the rhetorical stress is often emphasized by the limited, specific nature of the subject in relation to a given rhetorical situation. This is not to take refuge in "universality" as a criterion for poetic enterprise, but the speaking situation normally enforces more immediate limitations upon the exact nature of the subject. Consequently, as the subject is removed from specific limitations and as it moves away from controversy and the search for probability, the poetic bias appears.

It would be absurd to attempt a listing of subjects which might be rhetorical or poetical, but it would be equally absurd to insist that the subject can give no indication of a rhetorical or poetical stress. As with the criterion of purpose, the stress in regard to subject must be sought both in the materials of the communicative act and in critical

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<sup>173</sup>Aristotle Rhetoric iii. 4.

opinion. The communicative act will be the most important source for judgments, but critical opinion can be nearly as useful in that the critics will demonstrate the existence of any conventions and prescriptions which impose upon the choice that the poet may make.

Form. At the beginning of this essay there is a quotation in which prose is equated with rhetoric, verse with poetic, and this distinction is one most often used in distinguishing between the two modes of discourse. Almost any dictionary indicates this convention when the words verse, rhythm and rhyme are utilized in characterizing poetry. This distinction holds even though many critics have felt that the prose-verse consideration is but a superficial way of differentiating between rhetoric and poetic, and have argued that metre and rhyme were not the marks by which poetry could be separated from prose. They have insisted that there was a more fundamental distinction, following Aristotle's argument that "The distinction between historian and poet is not in the one writing prose and the other verse."<sup>174</sup> Minturno, Castelvetro, Scaliger, Sidney, and Dryden are some of the theorists who have accepted the Aristotelean position. Sidney writes, "One may be a poet without versing, and versifier without poetry,"<sup>175</sup> but he immediately adds:

Now that verse far exceedeth prose in the knitting up of the memory, the reason is manifest; the words (besides their delight, which hath a great affinity to memory) being so set as one cannot be lost but the whole work fails, which accusing itself, calleth the remembrance back to itself, and so most strongly confirmeth it.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>174</sup>Aristotle Poetics 1. 1451<sup>a</sup>1. Cf. 1. 1447<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>175</sup>Sidney, p. 437.

<sup>176</sup>Ibid.

Sidney is typical, for many of those who have maintained that metre and rhyme are not necessary elements in poetry have also contended that verse has some inherent superiority over prose, and verse form has been the predominate poetic pattern throughout history. Again, the twentieth century has seen less allegiance to conventional patterns, but this does not negate the criterion as a useful instrument. It may only mean that the convention is less compelling, or even that the poetry is more rhetorical in this respect.

In any event, most poetry has been composed in some formal verse pattern, but prose has been the characteristic vehicle for oratory. Rhetoricians from the Rhetorica ad Herennium through Henry Peachum's Garden of Eloquence have engaged in the seemingly endless analysis and elaboration of tropes and figures, but none suggests that the orator should compose in verse. This prose-verse distinction will serve as the basis for the determination of rhetoric or poetic stress, and whether this basis be profound or superficial, it can be a useful category. Some evidence of this distinction may be found in critical opinion, but the most important source will unquestionably be the materials which make up the linguistic communication. It will be prose or verse, thus indicating a rhetorical or poetical stress.

Authorial presence. Apart from any demonstrated attitude or bias, the presence and stance of the creator can indicate the degree of rhetorical stress in a linguistic communication, and since directness in the lines of relationship between communicator and his audience is the crucial factor here, this criterion can at least be approached by turning to the traditional discussions of "point of view." This is but a starting point, however, for after noting the first or third person point of

view, most writers would agree that, "Within the two general classes. . . almost infinite diversity is possible."<sup>177</sup> Further, the entire range of this diversity is open to the poet; nevertheless, he usually approaches the audience indirectly, operating in the area which Wayne C. Booth describes as a showing of the action.<sup>178</sup> This is opposed to the telling in rhetoric, and showing is indirect because the audience becomes aware of action by observing the creatures of the creator's imagination. The communication is filtered through the intelligence of one or more people, with the audience observing rather than participating in the scene. This is particularly obvious when the communication takes the form of dialogue, or when it is presented as an action in the past, but even the first person speaking in the present can be indirect. When Masfield says, "I must go down to the seas again," or when Thompson writes, "I am defenseless utterly," we do not necessarily feel that they are speaking directly to us. We are approaching a stronger rhetorical stress in these last examples, for that stress is indicated by structures which use or imply the personal pronouns, which give an awareness of immediate time and place, and which recognize any specifics of the speaking situation, particularly those imposed by the audience. Of course, it is possible for the poet to move in this realm; Frost does in "Provide, Provide," and Longfellow does in "Psalm of Life," but both move to a telling

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<sup>177</sup>Edward W. Rosenheim, What Happens in Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 72.

<sup>178</sup>Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 1, 211-40. Cf. Robert Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience the Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition (New York: Random House, 1957), pp. 155-56, and George T. Wright, The Poet in the Poem ("Perspectives in Criticism," No. 4; Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960).



and into the area of rhetoric. In his own right the speaker may approach his audience indirectly with an extended apostrophe or the constructed dialogue of protopopoeia, and there are many examples of impure showing and telling. Indirection by the speaker is one, and in the drama a Shakespearean or Shavian character may speak directly to the audience, but the impurities need not negate the applicability of the criterion; they may prove its usefulness.

In addition to characteristics which mark a communication as being presented in the first person present tense, the sense of immediate confrontation is enhanced by any usage which suggests an oral style. It can be agreed that differences between written and oral style are differences "of degree rather than kind,"<sup>179</sup> but this study is based upon degrees of distinction rather than upon absolutes, and there are indices which reveal a tendency toward oral style. In fact, the first person narrative is one such index. The degree of informality is another. Normally the writer is expected to be most formal in his efforts; customarily he is expected to exchew the use of slang and informal constructions. "Poetic" contractions or expressions are permitted if a part of the accepted canon, but prevailing grammatical norms have usually been demanded in poetry. Not that the speaker has been allowed to ignore the rules of grammar, but a freer colloquial expression has been more readily accepted in public address than in poetry.

Still another factor in determining oral style resides in some of the stock devices which have long been intimately associated with the rhetorical tradition. Under the most exhaustive analyses of tropes and

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<sup>179</sup>Lester Thonssen and A. Craig Baird, Speech Criticism (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1948), p. 427.



figures every word and expression falls into some category, and on the widest basis no difference can be seen between rhetoric and poetic. But both the rhetorical question and the exclamation appear to transcend any cataloguing, for both suggest the presence of an audience. The rhetorical question may be used as a transitional unit--Clay did this throughout his "Compromise Speech," in 1850--or the question may go unanswered, the response being self-evident. Yet however it may be employed, the question implies the presence of an intelligence which will follow and interpret the question. In this manner, the question makes for a closer relationship between creator and audience. Even though no answer comes from the audience, the rhetorical question tends to be heard, not overheard. The same can be said for exclamations. One may mutter oaths or imprecations to himself, but the emotional impact attempted in the exclamation demands a perceiving intelligence. Any communication demands reception by some intelligence, but the exclamation indicates a tighter bond of emotional intensity between creator and audience.

All the factors above can be taken as evidence of rhetorical bias in a communicative act, because the more directly the creator confronts his audience the more closely he approaches the typical rhetorical situation of public address. It can happen that these very factors will not lead the reader into the specific situation. References to time, place, audience, and occasion may well indicate a communication directed to an audience with which it is difficult to identify, but such structures do not change the rhetorical emphasis. One may feel little or no response when he reads or hears:

Gentlemen of the Senate: On the 18th of December last I addressed an identic note to the Governments of the nations now at war requesting them to state, more definitely than they had

yet been stated by either group of belligerents, the terms upon which they would deem it possible to make peace.<sup>180</sup>

Despite the remoteness which may seem to attach to such linguistic acts, the immediate confrontation of creator and audience is obvious.

Any evidence of such confrontations will probably be found in the communication itself. Critical opinion may offer some information about accepted standards of grammar and usage, but it is in the speeches and the poetry that the best indication of authorial presence can be found.

Mode. The sixth criterion of this pluralistic method of differentiating between rhetoric and poetic will be established by considering ethos, the impact of personality in shaping the effect which a communication has with the audience. This criterion is based in the Aristotelean division of proof into logical, emotional, and ethical. In the Rhetoric, we read:

The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker. . . . Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and more readily than others: This is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided. This kind of persuasion, like the others, should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what people think of this character before he begins to speak. It is not true, as some writers assume in their treatises on rhetoric, that personal goodness revealed by the speaker contributes nothing to his power of persuasion; on the contrary, his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses.<sup>181</sup>

Some of the reasons for the attitude expressed in this statement are apparent. Aristotle's observation of speakers and audiences undoubtedly

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<sup>180</sup>Woodrow Wilson, "Peace Without Victory," The World's Great Speeches, ed. Lewis Copeland (2nd rev. ed.; New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1958), p. 351.

<sup>181</sup>Aristotle Rhetoric 1. 2. 1356<sup>a</sup>2-14.

led him to conclude that the force of logic and the ability to stir the emotions were direct functions of the impression which the speaker made as an individual. He contends that, "The orator must not only try to make the argument of his speech demonstrative and worthy of belief; he must also make his own character look right,"<sup>182</sup> and says, "It adds much to an orator's influence that his own character should look right and that he would be thought to entertain the right feelings towards his hearers."<sup>183</sup> Furthermore, the Rhetoric is anchored in premises which have characterized political thought in all the Western democracies. In these societies the speaker is engaged in the world of practical affairs, the world of open discussion and political decision. In this arena, the speaker asks support for a given belief or course of action, and the ethical construct has regularly demanded that honesty prevail, that the speaker advance only those causes which he believes to be best for society. He is to be a vendor of truth, seeking what is best for society at large, and no base pursuit of vainglory is to mar his effort. That some speakers may have failed does not deny the ideal.

The ideal is illustrated when Aristotle says that the speaker's words should seem inspired by "moral purpose,"<sup>184</sup> when Cicero suggests that the greatest oratory must rest upon the study of philosophy and moral conduct,<sup>185</sup> and when Quintilian says:

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<sup>182</sup>Ibid., ii. 1. 1378<sup>a</sup>2-3.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid., ii. 1. 1378<sup>a</sup>25.

<sup>184</sup>Ibid., iii. 16, 1417<sup>a</sup>24.

<sup>185</sup>Cicero, De Inventione, trans. H. M. Hubbell (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1949) i.1.1.

It is of importance that an orator should be good because should the power of speaking be a support to evil, nothing would be more pernicious than eloquence, alike to public concerns and private. . . . Nature herself, in bestowing on man that which she seems to have granted him pre-eminently, and by which she appears to have distinguished us from all other animals, would have actioned, not as a parent, but as a step-mother, if she had designed the faculty of speech to be the promoter of crime, the oppressor of innocence, and the enemy of truth.<sup>186</sup>

Quintilian may be most interested in offering a defense of rhetoric in this contention, but it is significant that he supports his position with the argument that only the morally good man can achieve true eloquence. Bate points out that this standard became a part of literary evaluation as well, for the argument "that the orator must first of all be a good man was repeatedly applied to the poet in Renaissance and eighteenth century criticism."<sup>187</sup> Nevertheless, the speaker is always subject to this demand, and critics seek to offer relief to the poet because "He nothing affirms and therefore never lieth."<sup>188</sup> Sidney's position relates to the creator's purpose; once it be granted that the poet does more than offer some diversion or pleasure, his character must come into the critical reckoning. This circumstance is in part responsible for the attempts of contemporary critics to exclude truth claims from literary evaluations,<sup>189</sup> and we find Cleanth Brooks<sup>190</sup> and I. A. Richards

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<sup>186</sup>Quintilian Inst. xii. l. 1-2.

<sup>187</sup>Bate, p. 4.

<sup>188</sup>Sidney, p. 439.

<sup>189</sup>See John Hospers, Meaning and Truth in the Arts (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1946) and Morris Weitz, Philosophy of the Arts (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1950).

<sup>190</sup>Brooks, esp. pp. 192-266.

striving to eliminate any consideration of creator's personality in judging literature.<sup>191</sup>

In marked contrast with this view is the advice given the public speaker. From Aristotle's Rhetoric to the most recent public speaking textbook, the speaker is urged to do everything possible in the way of bringing the force of his personality to bear in the speaking situation. The difference in these two positions enables us to distinguish between the rhetorical and poetical stress, for any indication that the creator is attempting to gain audience acceptance through the medium of his personality will point to a rhetorical orientation. This evidence will be found within the communicative materials, and will be discovered by extending elements which relate to the point-of-view expressed. There must be an extension of these elements because the base use of personal pronouns does not necessarily indicate an attempt to capitalize upon ethical appeal. There must be an effort to create a personality which gives an impression of "good sense, good moral character, and goodwill,"<sup>192</sup> and this effort will be characterized by any technique which suggests to the audience that it is addressed by a person of tact, common sense, intelligence, courage, moral virtue, or any other quality deemed desirable.<sup>193</sup> The impression of personality that appears within the communicative material will be termed internal ethos in order to facilitate the discussion which must take into consideration the existence of external ethos, the impression of personality created outside the communication.

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<sup>191</sup>I. A. Richards, Practical Criticism (Harvest Book; New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., n.d.), pp. 3-16, 173-345.

<sup>192</sup>Aristotle Rhetoric ii. 1. 1378<sup>a</sup>8-9.

<sup>193</sup>Thonssen and Baird, pp. 383-91.



Aristotle shows an awareness of the impact of external ethos when he says that ethical proof "should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what people think of this character before he begins to speak," but in reference to this exclusion, Thonssen and Baird write:

It is, however, an artificial restriction, since the attitude of the audience toward the speaker--based upon previous knowledge of the latter's activities and reputation--cannot accurately be separated from the reaction the speaker induces through the medium of the speech.<sup>194</sup>

Further, various experimental studies have demonstrated that the prior reputation of the creator can have a decided effect upon the reception and interpretation of the communication.<sup>195</sup> Consequently, reputation and attempts to gain acceptance by activity which is not a part of the communication will be used in the determination of the rhetoric-poetic stress. Anything which the creator does outside the communication that is calculated to make a favorable impression upon the audience and that suggests the attempt to influence the acceptance of the communication will be considered as evidence of rhetorical bias. At the most obvious level, we may think of the politician who joins a church, kisses babies, or associates with camel drivers in the expectation of gaining favor with the people, but the egregious efforts do not deny the principle. If the goal be patent, the rhetorical stress is that much easier established. Such stress must be established, of course, by turning to activity apart from the communication, by turning to statements or activities in the

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<sup>194</sup>Ibid, p. 385.

<sup>195</sup>For excellent survey see Kenneth Andersen and Theodore Clevenger, Jr., "A Summary of Experimental Research in Ethos," Speech Monographs, XXX (June, 1963), pp. 59-78.



creator's private and public life of which the audience is aware.<sup>196</sup>

This completes the preliminary discussion of the six criteria which will be used in examining the relationships between rhetoric and poetic. As has been mentioned, there have been periods when these relationships overlapped remarkably--a fact made more striking in the analysis of the criteria--and a given period may reveal departures from the general conclusions reached in the foregoing descriptions. In order to account for possible deviations and in order to make for finer discrimination in applying the criteria to Walt Whitman and his poetry, the following essay will be devoted to a consideration of the six criteria within the narrower compass of the first half of the nineteenth century in America, the era which was to witness the birth of Leaves of Grass.

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<sup>196</sup>For additional discussion of both authorial presence and mode see A. W. Staub and G. P. Mohrmann, "Rhetoric and Poetic: A New Critique," Southern Speech Journal, XXVIII (Winter, 1962), pp. 131-41.

## RHETORIC AND POETIC: 1800-1855

In the preceding essays, it has been proposed that if useful comparisons are to be made between rhetoric and poetic a pluralistic and relative approach must be used in examining the relationships, and that criteria be established in the areas of creator, purpose, subject, form, authorial presence, and mode. It has been noted that attitudes regarding these criteria have not been constant, and that there have been times when distinctions between rhetoric and poetic virtually disappeared, but these circumstances do not militate against the pluralistic approach; rather, they support the method, for an area which has seen such confusing inter-relationships simply cannot be penetrated adequately by any single standard of evaluation. The circumstances do dictate, however, a narrowing of the criteria in the light of the inter-relationships which existed in the 1800-1855 period, because, if the standards of analysis are to be effective, they must reflect the dominant critical attitudes and prevailing practices in rhetoric and poetic in the United States during the first half of the nineteenth century. Theory and practice from another period might prove to be of little use when applied to the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass.

The terminal date for the period selected is self-explanatory; the initial date was established in order to provide a span which would encompass the theory and practice which was important even before Whitman's birth. Moreover, the criteria are relative standards, and although they will be described as precisely as possible, they do not exhibit sudden, volatile

changes; even as generalizations they will not jell into rigid, fixed categories. Consequently, it is far more reasonable to describe the criteria against the background given by the scope of the full half-century.

In order to describe these criteria as they operated within the period, the following discussion is structured to include preliminary examinations of theory and practice in both rhetoric and poetic. The results of these analyses will then be used to establish the criteria and to describe the resultant lines of relationship between rhetoric and poetic. In turning to the rhetorical theory and practice in America during the first half of the nineteenth century, we shall first consider the role of speakers and speechmaking, together with the factors which were most instrumental in creating the speaking and the attitudes towards it. This having been accomplished, we shall examine the nature of the speaking, including matters of style and any other dominant characteristics. The discussion of theory and practice in poetic will follow next, to be patterned in a similar fashion.

Edward G. Parker labeled the first half of the nineteenth century "The Golden Age of American Oratory,"<sup>197</sup> and while he was somewhat less than objective in his praise of the oratory of the period, there is more in his expression and in our remembering it than the mere desire to bathe in the reflected glory of our progenitors, for there were a number of factors which combined to make that age The Golden Age of Oratory in America. Most important were the myriad speaking opportunities, the embullient optimism and self-conscious nationalism in the new nation,

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<sup>197</sup>Edward B. Parker, The Golden Age of American Oratory (Boston: Whittemore, Niles, and Hall, 1857).

and the educational emphasis upon rhetorical training.

Speaking opportunities were offered by the very nature of the government because the successful operation of a democracy not only permitted free and open discussion; it demanded the talents of the speaker. It has been said:

Not only is history written with words. It is made with words. . . . Great movements. . . are usually led by men of action who are also men of words. . . . Literature in times of crisis becomes the words of men of action, of men who understand the power of words as weapons of warfare.<sup>198</sup>

To a degree the generalization holds for all ages, but it is particularly applicable to a nation which pretends to any measure of democracy. The Colonies inherited a taste for democracy as a portion of their birthright, and this legacy was, ironically, most instrumental in severing the political umbilical cord. Nurtured in the town meetings, pulpits, assemblies, and educational institutions, the right to free speech was considered a part of, and was used to support, the doctrine of inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.<sup>199</sup> The Revolution and the debates over the Constitution and the ratification of it provided some climaxes in the realm of oratory, but there was no decline in speaking opportunities with the turn of the century, which is suggested in the description from the Cambridge History of American Literature:

The first few decades of the century. . . gave alluring opportunity for oratory and offered also an unusual field for the jurist. The oratory had big themes--democracy, slavery, free labour, expansion, states rights, nationalism, as well as the well-worn subjects of banks and tariffs and lands and commerce. The jurist was called to the novel task of construing

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<sup>198</sup>William Norwood Brigance, ed., A History and Criticism of American Public Address (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1943), I, vii.

<sup>199</sup>George V. Bohman, "The Colonial Period," History and Criticism, ed. Brigance, I, 3-54.

constitutions, of passing the fundamental law of a federal republic, and more. . . .<sup>200</sup>

In our day, when much public speaking has been replaced by written communication; it is difficult to realize that this description gives only a hint of the opportunities which the public speaker found. Variety abounded whether the speaking be listed under the traditional headings of deliberative, forensic, and epideictic, or by occasions such as judicial, legislative, pulpit, scholastic, or platform, for as Bower Aly says of the period:

The fact is. . . that speechmaking went on in the daily exercise of life in situations and under conditions that defy classification. And if no situation requiring speechmaking was at hand, one was invented.<sup>201</sup>

It is important to remark that speechmaking went beyond the needs and demands of the society and its government in the solving of problems which faced the new nation. Oratory fed upon itself and tended to become emphasized as a self-contained activity which was important and valuable per se. Even before the turn of the century, De Crevecoeur had noted that Americans were inclined to indulge in speaking as a form of recreation,<sup>202</sup> and near the end of the period under consideration De Toqueville said:

Debating clubs are, to a certain extent, a substitute for Theatrical entertainments; An American cannot converse, but he can discuss; and his talk falls into a dissertation. He speaks to you as if he was addressing a meeting; and if he should chance to

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<sup>200</sup>Cambridge History of American Literature, II, 71.

<sup>201</sup>Bower Aly, "The Early National Period," History and Criticism, ed. Brigrance, I, 81.

<sup>202</sup>J. Hector St. John Crevecoeur, Letters from an American Farmer (Dolphin Books; Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., n.d.), Letter VIII.

become warm in the discussion, he will say "Gentlemen" to the person with whom he is conversing.<sup>203</sup>

In a discussion of the criticism to which oratory was subjected at this time, Barnet Baskerville has shown that much public speaking was looked upon as a dramatic performance,<sup>204</sup> and C. M. Statham's study of dramatic criticism of the era demonstrates that vocal performance of both speaker and actor was evaluated from the same critical base.<sup>205</sup> Thus, to some degree, oratory was disengaged from the practical purposes which are customarily associated with public address, and the speech looked upon as a device wherein the speaker might display his talents. Oratory, in this light, can be an activity which is pursued for its own sake, and Baskerville remarks that some critics were more impressed "by what oratory can do for the orator than what it can do for truth or the good of mankind."<sup>206</sup> Parker, for example, says, "These only are the 'great' orators, who rule the sense and the souls of men, as the moon rules the tides of the sea,"<sup>207</sup> and although he mentions conviction and logic as being essential elements in oratory, William Mathews gives himself away when he says:

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<sup>203</sup>Alexis De Tocqueville, Democracy In America, trans. Henry Reeves (New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1855), I, 271-2.

<sup>204</sup>Barnet Baskerville, "The Dramatic Criticism of Oratory," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLV (February, 1959), pp. 39-45.

<sup>205</sup>Charles M. Statham, "An Application of Prevailing Principles of Elocution to Theatrical Criticism of American Acting: 1815-1840," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Speech, University of Florida, 1958).

<sup>206</sup>Barnet Baskerville, "Principal Themes of Nineteenth-Century Critics of Oratory," Speech Monographs, XIX (March, 1952), p. 17.

<sup>207</sup>Parker, p. 340.



The orator is not compelled to wait through long and weary years to reap the reward of his labors. His triumphs are instantaneous; they follow his efforts as the thunderpeal follows the lightning's flash. While he is in the very act of forming his sentences, his triumph is reflected from the countenances of his hearers, and is sounded from their lips. To stand up before a vast assembly composed of men of the most various callings, views, passions, and prejudices, and mould them at will; to play upon their hearts and minds as a master upon the keys of a piano. . . to see the whole assembly animated by the feelings which in him are burning and struggling for utterance; and to think that all this is the creation of the moment, and has sprung instantaneously from his fiery brain and the inspiration imparted to it by the circumstances of the hour;—this, perhaps, is the greatest triumph of which the human mind is capable, and that in which its divinity is most signally revealed.<sup>208</sup>

Nevertheless, most speaking took place in response to some immediate situation, and most of it failed to reach the heights envisioned by those who worshipped oratory. De Tocqueville laments the quality of public address, saying that the people "are resigned to it as an evil that they know to be inevitable,"<sup>209</sup> and in this very resignation we find traces of the optimistic spirit of the new nation, another factor shaping the public address of the day.

In a true democracy, "It is the cardinal principle that free criticism and analysis by all and sundry is the highest virtue."<sup>210</sup> If the sundry happens to include those who would "speak for Buncombe," it is a burden which must be borne, and despite observable differences between the espoused ideal and the reality of life in the new nation, the country was founded in an optimistic spirit, and grew on that same spirit. It was a time when the "European mind broke loose from its traditions and

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<sup>208</sup>William Mathews, Oratory and Orators (11th ed.; Chicago: S. C. Griggs and Co., 1891), p. 11.

<sup>209</sup>De Tocqueville, II, 97.

<sup>210</sup>Carl Lotus Becker, Freedom and Responsibility in the American Way of Life (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 37.

plunged enthusiastically into new modes of adventure."<sup>211</sup> The growth of the United States was part of the grand adventure, but most important was the adventure of the mind because man had come to believe, as Carl Becker points out, that the free play of human reason could discover "the invariable laws of nature and nature's God and, by bringing the ideas and institutions of men into conformity with them, find the way . . . to perfection and happiness,"<sup>212</sup> and as he goes on to say, these beliefs resulted in the fact that:

The eighteenth century was the moment in history when men experienced the first flush and freshness of the idea that man is master of his own fate; the moment in history, also, when this emancipating idea . . . could be accepted with unclouded optimism.<sup>213</sup>

The trapper on the frontier may have been little concerned about the innate dignity of man, and the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are susceptible to an economic interpretation, but the intellectual climate of the Enlightenment is reflected in the two documents. The responsibility of the individual citizen is stated and implied throughout, the implied corollary of the doctrine of "certain inalienable rights" being:

If happiness is the right of our neighbor, then not to hinder him but to help him in its pursuit, must plainly be our duty. If all men have a claim, then each man is under an obligation.<sup>214</sup>

This notion was expanded and tested in debates over currency, internal improvements, and war policy, and by 1820:

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<sup>211</sup>Nathaniel W. Stephenson, A History of the American People (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 17.

<sup>212</sup>Becker, pp. 35-36.

<sup>213</sup>Ibid.

<sup>214</sup>Moses Coit Tyler, The Literary History of the American Revolution 1763-1783 (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1957), I, 518.

The idea that the Union was the creature not of a group of states but an assemblage of people occupying their states was the same thing as asserting the existence of an American nation. Henceforth a belief in this idea--what we label "nationalism"--was a prime factor in American life.<sup>215</sup>

Even the emergence of sectional interests in the latter half of the period could not completely obscure the nationalistic image, a fact which is underlined in some of the debates which grew out of the sectional conflict, for each section liked to insist that it was the true representative of the national character. This nationalism became most self-conscious, which could have been expected. The struggle for independence and the rapid expansion undoubtedly made the people particularly aware of their own achievements,<sup>216</sup> and whatever the shortcomings of the Turner Thesis, the frontier nurtured a feeling of self importance.<sup>217</sup> And the disturbing questions about "Who reads an American book" most certainly stirred the desire to create a national culture.

There was a natural aping of British models in politics and in the arts, but the impact of the Augustan age had not yet disappeared nor had the inspiration of its sources in Greece and Rome.<sup>218</sup> The governments and literature from those earlier republics were shrines at which the

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<sup>215</sup>Stephenson, p. 400. Cf. John D. Hicks, A Short History of American Democracy (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1949), pp. 1-28, 182-387; Harry J. Carman and Harold C. Syrett, A History of the American People (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), I, 253-551.

<sup>216</sup>Stephenson, pp. 385-400. Cf. Hicks, p. 2.

<sup>217</sup>Frederick Jackson Turner, The Frontier in American History (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1920). For discussion of Turners main thesis see The Turner Thesis, ed. George R. Taylor (Rev. ed.; Boston: Heath, 1956).

<sup>218</sup>Bigelow, pp. 28-39. Cf. Lewis Mumford, The Golden Day (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1926) and Max Savelle, American Civilization (New York: The Dryden Press, Inc., 1957).

later day could worship, but it was not blind idolatry in America. The shortcomings of the earlier democracies were recognized, and speakers argued that the United States must surpass the models of antiquity and improve the application of the democratic ideal.<sup>219</sup>

The form of government, the spirit of optimism, and the self-conscious nationalism which looked to Greece and Rome combined to create a situation which Benjamin T. Spencer notes in his study of nationalism in American letters, saying:

The literary esteem accorded eloquence in Roman antiquity, its traditional association with republicanism, and its functional presence on innumerable patriotic occasions in the new republic all combined to focus attention on the oration as a national mode of expression.<sup>220</sup>

Van Wyck Brooks writes of the Boston citizens:

With Faneuil Hall as their Acropolis, they were accustomed to public speaking, and oratory had filled them with exalted thoughts. . . . Their fathers and uncles had fought. . . swept along by a tide of eloquence. Moreover, Plutarch was their second Bible, together with Pope's Homer. Deep in their hearts they cherished the conviction that they could emulate these heroic models and reproduce the deeds of history.<sup>221</sup>

F. O. Matthiessen concludes of the era that "the one branch of literature in which America had developed a tradition was oratory,"<sup>222</sup> and Baskerville says:

Nineteenth-century America displayed an enthusiasm for "eloquence" and "oratory" which is difficult for the modern reader fully to appreciate. Young men who aspired to leadership in any field were counseled that the cultivation of eloquence

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<sup>219</sup>For discussion of optimism see Arthur A. Ekirch, The Idea of Progress in America 1815-1860 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944).

<sup>220</sup>Spencer, p. 59.

<sup>221</sup>Van Wyck Brooks, The Flowering of New England 1815-1865 (Rev. ed.; New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1937), pp. 13-14.

<sup>222</sup>Matthiessen, p. xiv.

was the surest, speediest avenue to success. Writers were fond of referring to this country as a nation of speakers, implying that there was something conducive to eloquence in the American atmosphere. Besides, Americans were increasingly aware of themselves as a nation, a new democratic nation which they consciously patterned after the great democracies of antiquity. The same spirit which impelled them to name their cities Troy, Athens, and Ithaca, and to adorn the western prairies with monstrous imitations of classical architecture, caused them to apotheosize their orators and to compare Daniel Webster, the American, with Demosthenes, the Greek.<sup>223</sup>

Beyond the factors which have been reviewed, there is another important consideration in the development of public address during the first half of the nineteenth century in America. This consideration is the rhetorical training which the speakers received in high schools, academies, colleges, and universities. In 1829, Samuel L. Knapp pictured the efforts expended in this direction when he wrote:

No country on earth has ever laboured harder to make orators than our own. In addition to the fifty-three colleges, where classical educations are given there are hundreds of minor institutions in which every rule of rhetoric is committed to memory; and every student can give you all the maxims from Blair, Campbell, and others, necessary to make an orator; can tell you when to extend the arm, balance the body, raise the eyes, quicken the utterance, elevate the voice, and all the other golden rules to build up a Demosthenes or Chatham.<sup>224</sup>

We shall examine this educational effort because the theory and practice which came out of the schools were particularly influential for both rhetoric and poetic.

Practices varied from the elementary school through the high school to college or university; they varied from one institution to another; there were changes which took place during the period; nevertheless, some generalizations can be made. Most importantly, Knapp is

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<sup>223</sup>Baskerville, "Principal Themes," p. 11.

<sup>224</sup>Samuel L. Knapp, Lectures on American Literature (New York: Elan Bliss, 1829), p. 218.



accurate in his description, a fact borne out by recent studies.<sup>225</sup>

As he made his way through the educational institutions, the student was exposed to a great deal of rhetorical theory and engaged in a variety of speaking experiences. There were classes in rhetoric and elocution, debates and commencement speeches, literary and debating societies,<sup>226</sup> all of which lead to the conclusion:

Throughout this period oral communication was the medium through which the art of rhetoric found its expression. Rhetoric and oratory were consistently coupled both in the curriculums and in the thinking of the period.<sup>227</sup>

The dominating theories in the curriculums are suggested in Knapp's quotation above, for in mentioning Blair and Campbell, he indicated the general acceptance of the Scottish rhetoricians. Of these theorists, Warren Guthrie says:

Blair, Campbell, Whately, and to a lesser extent Jamieson--these were the rhetorical names which almost every student in the nineteenth century colleges knew, and these were the men to dominate American rhetorical theory through 1850.<sup>228</sup>

Some of these writers presented elementary work, and others operated at an advanced level,<sup>229</sup> but as a group they furnished the theoretical foundations for practice and criticism, and Guthrie concludes:

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<sup>225</sup>For discussion see the studies in History of Speech Education in America ed. Karl R. Wallace (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc. 1954).

<sup>226</sup>Ibid., and Ota Thomas "The Teaching of Rhetoric in the United States during the Classical Period of Education," Brigance, I, 193-210.

<sup>227</sup>Thomas, p. 203.

<sup>228</sup>Warren Guthrie, "The Development of Rhetorical Theory in America: 1635-1850, III," Speech Monographs, XV (1948), p. 61.

<sup>229</sup>Ibid., p. 61-71.



Thus during the years in which American rhetoric was to develop, the control was clearly held by great English works. Blair made his great contribution in popularizing the critical and belles-lettistic phase of rhetorical training. Campbell carried the classical doctrines of persuasion into contact with contemporary psychological theories and knowledge, and Whately presented the Aristotelian doctrine of Invention as the core of rhetoric. Jamieson brought the modern counter-part of the older rhetorics of style—a rhetoric of composition seeking accuracy and beauty, with little concept of or interest in persuasion.<sup>230</sup>

Customarily assigned a minor role in the rhetorical theory of the era, Lord Kames' Elements of Criticism must also be included in this discussion of important treatises.<sup>231</sup> Kames based his inquiry on those principles which lay behind the writings of the other influential theorists, and his psychological approach to the arts was in the spirit of the times.<sup>232</sup> He considered eloquence to be one of the fine arts, and his speculation encouraged the growth of the elocution movement, but before examining the influence from that quarter, we shall consider the import of the Scottish sources.

The Scots propounded what has become known as the belletristic theory of rhetoric,<sup>233</sup> and of special significance in the system is the condition that:

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<sup>230</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>231</sup>See Vincent Bevelacqua, "Rhetoric and Human Nature in Kames's Elements of Criticism," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLVIII (February, 1962), pp. 46-50.

<sup>232</sup>Gordon McKenzie, Critical Responsiveness, A Study of the Psychological Current in Later Eighteenth-Century Criticism ("University of California Publications in English," Vol. 20; Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1949). Cf. Bate, Classic to Romantic.

<sup>233</sup>See Douglas W. Elminger, "Dominant Trends in English Rhetorical Thought, 1750-1800," Southern Speech Journal, XVIII (September, 1952), pp. 3-12.

In the rhetoric of belles lettres nearly all specific rules and principles have a double function. On the one hand, they are guides to composing; on the other, standards for judging. They are, at least in theory equally useful to the writer or speaker and to the critic.<sup>234</sup>

All discourse falls under a common rubric, and it follows that the line between spoken and written discourse disappears. Oratory and poetry tend to fall together, and differentiation between verse and prose becomes problematical.<sup>235</sup> Witness Blair saying:

The truth is, verse and prose, on some occasions run into one another, like light and shade. It is hardly possible to determine the exact limit where eloquence ends, and poetry begins; nor is there any occasion for being very precise about the boundaries, as long as the nature of each is understood.<sup>236</sup>

But nowhere in Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres is any precision demonstrated in distinguishing between the nature of the two. Blair does argue that the orator's aim is to "inform, to persuade, or to instruct,"<sup>237</sup> the poet's aim is to "please, and to move; and therefore, it is to the imagination, and the passions, that he speaks."<sup>238</sup> Yet he says that high eloquence "is always the offspring of passion," and that pleasing is a primary function of the best oratory.<sup>239</sup> This blurring of distinctions seems to be the result of confusion, but there is no confusion in Campbell's mind when he writes:

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<sup>234</sup>Ibid., pp. 11-12.

<sup>235</sup>Ibid.

<sup>236</sup>Hugh Blair, Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (Halifax: William Milner, 1842), Lecture XXXIII, p. 511.

<sup>237</sup>Ibid.

<sup>238</sup>Ibid.

<sup>239</sup>Ibid., p. 317.

Poetry, indeed is properly no other than a particular mode or form or certain branch of oratory. . . . The direct end of the former, whether to delight the fancy, as in epic, or to move the passions, as in tragedy, is avowedly in part the aim, and sometimes the immediate and proposed aim, of oratory. The same medium, language, is made use of, the same general rules of composition, in narration, description, argumentation, are observed; and the same tropes and figures, either for beautifying or for invigorating the diction are employed by both.<sup>240</sup>

Whately says that style is of equal concern to poet, orator, and historian,<sup>241</sup> and his casual attitude toward distinctions is reflected when he writes:

According to the views taken, good Poetry might be defined "Elegant and decorated language, in metre, expressing such and such thoughts;" and good Prose-composition, "such and such thoughts expressed in good language;" and which is primary in each, being subordinate in the other.<sup>242</sup>

Kames follows this same pattern,<sup>243</sup> and in all of these works there is a lumping of the uses of language no matter what the purpose, and it is significant that the writers find eloquence to be a highly creative and artistic enterprise.<sup>244</sup>

It is customary to point to the mechanical manner in which the Scots approached stylistic matters,<sup>245</sup> and it is true that they attempted to codify all linguistic production. At the same time, they provided a number of general statements which could be interpreted broadly, and

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<sup>240</sup>Campbell, p. 12.

<sup>241</sup>Richard Whately, Elements of Rhetoric (7th ed.; London: John W. Parker, 1846), p. 257.

<sup>242</sup>Ibid., p. 335.

<sup>243</sup>Kames, p. 389.

<sup>244</sup>Ibid., pp. 130-39. Cf. Blair, Lecture XXV.

<sup>245</sup>William Charvat, The Origins of American Critical Thought 1810-1835 (New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., Inc., 1961), pp. 111-20.

which would encourage the use of elaborate and flowery language. Kames says, "Grandeur. . . is not readily produced in perfection but by reiterated impressions,"<sup>246</sup> and he urges an extended development of ideas and figures.

Elair contends that spoken discourse should be more diffuse than one written, "A flowing copious Style, therefore, is required of all public speakers."<sup>247</sup> Discussing types of style, he says of the Vehement:

It has a peculiar ardour; it is a glowing Style; the language of a man, whose imagination and passions are heated, and strongly affected by what he writes; who is therefore negligent of lesser graces, but pours himself forth with the rapidity and fulness of a torrent. It belongs to the higher kinds of oratory; and, indeed, is rather expected from a man who is speaking, than from one who is writing in his closet.<sup>248</sup>

In this last quotation we see adherence to the Longinian dictum that a great style overcomes lesser blemishes, and both Kames and Elair were indebted to On the Sublime.<sup>249</sup> Their advice was coupled with cautions as to the dangers inherent in attempting to do what did not come naturally, but the space given over to the discussion of practice and mastery of style and the status accorded stylistic excellence could not but lead the reader to conclude that he should at least try for the zenith. He was told that he must eschew figures and images if he had no talent, but who was to say a man had no talent until he presented his efforts?

Such efforts were also encouraged in another way by the Scots, for they agreed that both orator and poet were subject to the command of inspired genius. As Bate notes, many of the theorists of the eighteenth

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<sup>246</sup>Kames, p. 114. Cf. Howard H. Martin, "'Style' in the Golden Age," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLIII (December, 1957), pp. 374-82.

<sup>247</sup>Elair, Lecture XVIII, p. 233.

<sup>248</sup>Ibid., Lecture XIX, pp. 249-50.

<sup>249</sup>See Monk.

century demonstrated a strange amalgam of classical and romantic tendencies.<sup>250</sup> The Scots accepted the "existence and validity of the universal or ideal"<sup>251</sup> based upon "the clarity, the authority, and the universal acceptability of Nature and Nature's laws,"<sup>252</sup> but they argued at the same time, "Eloquence is no invention of the schools. Nature teaches every man to be eloquent when he is much in earnest."<sup>253</sup> They believed that in moments of true greatness, the genius of the artist transcended the rules, and genius in verbal art would be revealed in the command of language. Again the artist was cautioned that not all possessed genuine talent, but who was to make the judgment before performance? Since there was no way to determine the presence of genius, the speaker or poet was encouraged to become mechanically proficient and to trust in inspiration at the moment of composition.

The belief in guiding genius also promoted the acceptance of oratory as a self-justified artistic endeavor. This is revealed in the criticism of the period, and describing the highest order of eloquence, Knapp says:

This high and commanding power is inconsistent with petty views and absorbing selfishness. To give it all its influence, there must be something in it of the apostle's purity and the prophet's fire. It blazes in the pulpit and illumines the court room, but it is not confined to them or to the halls of legislation. The true orator wants not place to give him inspiration; wherever he moves, the oracle goes with him. A stone or stump will answer for a tripod, and to him the common air is full of Delphick incense.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>250</sup>Bate, pp. 112-13.

<sup>251</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>252</sup>Basil Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 2.

<sup>253</sup>Blair, Lecture XXV, p. 316.

<sup>254</sup>Knapp, p. 213.



Parker says that in achieving true eloquence the speaker operates in the area of "highest sentimentalities and purest enthusiasms," and that after grasping the coarser themes of the day:

. . . he should then organize them with ideal beauty and inspire them with glowing enthusiasms; over the driest and barest business details, he should keep the star-spangled flag of sentiment ever flying. To do this requires a regal endowment of natural gifts; the gift of rough business capacity, the mental attitude of command, and exquisite delicacy of the susceptible natures.<sup>255</sup>

Looking back to the period, Mathews concurs with Parker, but after averring that the orator is both born and made, he argues:

Nature only it is that can inspire that rapturous enthusiasm, that burning passion, that "furious pride and joy of the soul," which calls up the imagination of the orator,—that makes his rhetoric become a whirlwind, and make his logic, fire.<sup>256</sup>

An emphasis upon a vehement, impassioned delivery was nurtured by the elocution movement, too, because the study of voice and gesture occupied the theorists who addressed themselves to this segment of rhetorical theory.<sup>257</sup> These writers agreed that, "the passions and the fancy have a language of their own,"<sup>258</sup> that "nature fixes the outward expression of every intention and sentiment of the mind,"<sup>259</sup> and that the study of delivery, "is founded in nature, and must be derived originally, from

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<sup>255</sup>Parker, pp. 5-6.

<sup>256</sup>Mathews, p. 66.

<sup>257</sup>Warren Guthrie, "The Development of Rhetorical Theory in America, 1635-1850, V," Speech Monographs, XVIII (March, 1951), pp. 17-30.

<sup>258</sup>Thomas Sheridan, A Course of Lectures on Elocution (London: J. Dodsley, 1772), p. xii.

<sup>259</sup>James Burgh, The Art of Speaking (London: T. Longman, 1772), p. 13.



the natural expressions of the passions.<sup>260</sup> Teaching methods varied, but in spite of pedagogical differences, the elocutionists were unanimous in urging that greater attention be given delivery because:

. . . the tone of our voice, our looks, and gestures, interpret our ideas and emotions not less than the words do; nay, the impression they make upon others, is frequently much stronger than any words can make.<sup>261</sup>

The movement had a remarkable popularity in the United States, with elocution being taught in high schools, academies, colleges, and universities,<sup>262</sup> and evidence of the impact is to be seen in the fact that this trend continued on into the twentieth century, some of the elocution theorists being cited in today's speech textbooks.<sup>263</sup>

The elocutionists employed the particularized psychological analysis which became a dominant trend in eighteenth century British criticism;<sup>264</sup> consequently, the Kamesian approach supported the movement. He not only forwarded the psychological orientation, but went on to place great emphasis upon appeals to eye and ear, contending that these senses made possible the effect in all fine art.<sup>265</sup> He argued that the speaker

<sup>260</sup>Gilbert Austin, Chironomia (London: W. Bulwer and Company, 1806), p. 186.

<sup>261</sup>Blair, Lecture XXXIII, p. 442.

<sup>262</sup>Gladys L. Borchers and Lillian R. Wagner, "Speech Education in Nineteenth-Century Schools," Speech Education, ed. Wallace, pp. 277-300; Mary Margaret Robb, Oral Interpretation of Literature in American Colleges and Universities (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1941).

<sup>263</sup>Lionel Crocker and Louis M. Eich, Oral Reading (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1947); Wayland M. Parrish, Reading Aloud (Rev. Ed.; New York: The Ronald Press, 1941).

<sup>264</sup>Bate, pp. 93-97.

<sup>265</sup>Kames, pp. ix-xi, 25, 32.

revealed his true feelings in his looks and gestures,<sup>266</sup> and wrote:

Certain sounds are by nature allotted to each passion for expressing it externally. . . . who has these sounds at command to captivate the ear, is mighty; if he have also proper gestures at command to captivate the eye, he is irresistible.<sup>267</sup>

The authoritative character of such dicta in Elements of Criticism unquestionably assisted the growth of the elocution movement. Kames and the other Scots also furthered the same cause when they attempted to show the relationships between moral and religious values and standards of good taste in literature.<sup>268</sup> The use of literature to inculcate such values was a strong secondary emphasis in many of the elocution textbooks.<sup>269</sup> The theorists hoped to teach good taste in the belief that this would lead to moral excellence, and this approach appealed to a country striving self-consciously for achievement. The doctrines of the ancients also supported the elocutionists who were fond of appealing to the authority of Cicero and Quintilian, both of whom had given attention to delivery.<sup>270</sup>

Of course the ancients received attention in their own right. Their treatises were in use, and the trend toward liberal education meant that the student encountered Cicero and his orations as well as other classical

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<sup>266</sup>Ibid., pp. 192-202.

<sup>267</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>268</sup>Ibid., pp. xii-xlii, 37-38, 439-46; Blair, Lectures I, II.

<sup>269</sup>See William Enfield, The Speaker (Philadelphia: W. W. Woodward, 1799); Lindley Murray, The English Reader (New York: Collins and Hannay, 1829); Ebenezer Porter, Rhetorical Reader (New York: Mark H. Newman, 1835).

<sup>270</sup>Cicero, Orator, trans. H. M. Hubbell (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1952) 17.55-19.60; Quintilian Inst. xi.3.1-184.

sources.<sup>271</sup> The student also met with Cicero and Quintillian in the rhetorics of Jamieson and John Ward.<sup>272</sup> The latter's A System of Oratory was a restatement of classical doctrines, and attaining some degree of general circulation, it dominated the college field until the close of the eighteenth century.<sup>273</sup> The re-interpretation of classical doctrines is most important for having added emphasis to the concern with style which was so much a part of the belletristic position. All of these influences combined with the social and political milieu to enhance the prestige of the speaker. His highest efforts were considered to be truly artistic, motivated by genius, and marked by fire in word and action.

It has been mentioned that the speaking of the era moved in the direction of theatrical entertainment, and it should be noted here that the prevalence of ceremonial oratory played a part in this development. This type of speaking became so popular that a graduation or dedication was less than adequate if an Everett or a Webster was not present to dignify the occasion. Writing in 1857, Parker said, "It is on the Platform that American eloquence is now most frequently enjoyed,"<sup>274</sup> and the reference is to occasional oratory, much of it epideictic. Yet no matter what method we may use for classification of the various types of oratory, it

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<sup>271</sup> See Wallace, Speech Education; Thomas, "The Teaching of Rhetoric."

<sup>272</sup> See Douglas Ehninger, "John Ward and his Rhetoric," Speech Monographs, XVIII (March, 1951), pp. 1-16. Cf. Guthrie, "Development-III."

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Parker, p. 257. Cf. Lorenzo Sears, The Occasional Address (New York: Putnam's, 1897).

is possible to abstract certain general characteristics which apply to all of the speaking, for the speakers usually followed certain patterns.

Turning to those characteristics, the first to be noted is the formal, stylized structure which can be observed in many of the speeches. The tendency has its foundations in the oldest of rhetorical treatises, and scholars have traced it in the speaking of the period.<sup>275</sup> Customarily, the speeches developed in a predictable pattern, and the speaker often announced with profound humility that he was most unworthy of the great task before him. He regularly begged the indulgence of the auditors, and might well have said, "Before such an audience and on such an occasion I enter on the duty assigned me with trembling,"<sup>276</sup> or, "I will, however, endeavor to hobble over the subject as well as my fettered limbs and palsied tongue will enable me to do it."<sup>277</sup> The listener could also anticipate a peroration which might conclude with a single sentence of the following proportions:

Let their last feeble and lingering glance rather behold the gorgeous ensign of the republic, now known and honored throughout the earth, still full high advanced, its arms and trophies streaming in their original lustre, not a stripe erased or polluted, nor a single star obscured, bearing for its motto, no such miserable interrogatory as "What is all this worth?" nor those other words of delusion and folly, "Liberty first and Union afterwards;" but everywhere, spread all over in characters of living light, blazing on all its ample folds, as they float over

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<sup>275</sup>Martin, "The Golden Age"; Howard H. Martin, "The Fourth of July Oration," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLIV (December, 1958), pp. 393-402; Richard Weaver, The Ethics of Rhetoric (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953), pp. 164-85.

<sup>276</sup>Eliphalet Nott, "On the Death of Hamilton," The World's Famous Orations, ed. William Jennings Bryan (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, Co., 1906), VIII, 174. This collection of speeches will be cited below as Bryan.

<sup>277</sup>John Randolph, "On offensive War with England," Bryan, VIII, 186.

the sea and over the land, and in every wind under the whole heaven, that other sentiment, dear to every true American here,-- Liberty and Union, now and for ever, one and inseparable!<sup>278</sup>

In addition to illustrating the stylized structure, these words of Daniel Webster point to other typical qualities in the oratory, for the extract reveals an overlay of optimistic nationalism and a style marked by copiousness and periphrasis.

The optimistic nationalism in the speaking has earned it the label "spread-eagle," and while we may find the patriotism jejune, we must remember the accuracy in Alfred North Whitehead's observation that a society must have a vibrant set of verbal symbols if it is to continue to exist and develop.<sup>279</sup> The United States needed such symbols, and the orator remarked that, "Self government is the natural government of man,"<sup>280</sup> proving his point by turning to the brilliant prospects of the new country, "A rising nation, spread over a wide and fruitful land. . . advancing rapidly to destinies beyond the reach of mortal eye."<sup>281</sup>

Richard Weaver says that the copious and periphrastic style gives most of these speeches an impression of "spaciousness:"

It seems that between the speech itself and the things it is meant to signify, something stands--perhaps it is only an empty space--but something is there to prevent immediate realizations and references.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>278</sup>Daniel Webster, "In Reply to Hayne," Bryan, IX, 63.

<sup>279</sup>Alfred North Whitehead, Symbolism, Its Meaning and Effect (New York: Macmillan, 1927), pp. 84-88.

<sup>280</sup>Henry Clay, "The Emancipation of South America," Bryan, IX, 85.

<sup>281</sup>Thomas Jefferson, "First Inauguration Address," American Speeches, ed. Wayland Maxfield Parrish and Marie Hochmuth (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1954), p. 96.

<sup>282</sup>Weaver, p. 164.



Whatever the effect produced, custom and education dictated that the speaker employ both amplification and indirection, and his language was likely to seem studied.

We have seen that Webster, speaking of his last glimpse of the flag, said, "the last feeble and lingering glance," and the flag itself was "the gorgeous ensign of the republic." The orator did not speak of a "just peace," a "lasting peace," and "honorable peace," or even of a "just, lasting, and honorable peace." He spoke of "peace with all its benign, and felicitous, and beneficent influences!"<sup>283</sup> Describing the changes since the Revolution, Everett dilated upon the scene before him, saying, "Tall grass now waves in the trampled sallyport of some of the rural redoubts that form a part of the simple lines of circumvallations."<sup>284</sup> The lines of circumvallations may have been simple but the diction and structure were not, nor were they when Thomas Hart Benton remarked, "That expression of confidence was not an ebullition of vanity or presumptuous calculation intended to accelerate the event it affected to foretell."<sup>285</sup> The periphrasis and the accompanying use of the studied, bookish term is obvious.

In the latter category, the speaker was likely to say "proboscis" rather than "nose;" he spoke of "calamitous prognostications" rather than "predictions;" he was upset, not by "questions," but by "interrogatories." The studied term and the inclination toward amplification sometimes were combined in the figurative use of language. A coffin was "a narrow,

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<sup>283</sup>Thomas Hart Benton, "On the Expunging Resolution," Bryan, VIII, 245.

<sup>284</sup>Edward Everett, "The Issue in the Revolution," Bryan, VIII, 197.

<sup>285</sup>Benton, p. 240.



subterranean cabin,<sup>286</sup> and a statesman, "your brightest ornament."<sup>287</sup> The use of figurative language itself is not unusual, for figures always will be employed, and there is nothing unusual in the remark that a man hides "his head like an ostrich in the flowering bushes,"<sup>288</sup> or in the observation that in religious doctrine, "Much stubble is yet to be burned, much rubbish to be removed."<sup>289</sup> Yet most of the speakers saturated their speeches with images, many of them extended in the extreme. For example, just a portion of a description of Lafayette reads:

He who taught the eagle of our country, while yet unfledged, to plume his young wings and mate his talons with the lion's strength, has taken flight far beyond the stars, beneath whose influence he fought so well.<sup>290</sup>

Discussing the problem of sea power, John Randolph expounded:

What! Shall this great mammoth of the American forest leave his native element and plunge into the water in a mad contest with the shark? Let him beware that his proboscis is not bitten off in the engagement. Let him stay on shore, and not be excited by the mussels and periwinkles on the strand, or political bears, in a boat to venture on the perils of the deep.<sup>291</sup>

Calhoun provided another good example in his speech during the Compromise of 1850 when he amplified upon the image of the cords binding the union

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<sup>286</sup>Nott, p. 181.

<sup>287</sup>Gouverneur Morris, "Alexander Hamilton," World's Great Speeches, p. 265.

<sup>288</sup>Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," American Speeches, p. 277.

<sup>289</sup>William Ellery Channing, "Unitarian Christianity," American Speeches, p. 262.

<sup>290</sup>Sargent S. Prentiss, "On the Death of Lafayette," Bryan, VIII, 218-19.

<sup>291</sup>Randolph, pp. 189-90.

together.<sup>292</sup> In "The American Scholar," Emerson piled image upon image, and a striking figure is to be found in the comparison which he drew between the fire of the mind and the eruption of volcanoes.<sup>293</sup> Sumner illustrated all of the characteristics mentioned thus far when he described the state of Kansas:

Take down your map sir, and you will find that the Territory of Kansas, more than any other region, occupies the middle spot of North America, equally distant from the Atlantic on the east and the Pacific on the west; from the frozen waters of Hudson's Bay on the north, and the tepid Gulf Stream on the south, constituting the precise Territorial center of the whole vast continent. To such advantages of situation, on the very highway between two oceans, are added beauty of surface, with a health-giving climate, calculated to nurture a powerful and generous people, worthy to be a central pivot of American institutions. A few short months only have passed since this spacious and mediterranean country was open only to the savage who ran wild in its woods and prairies; and now it has already drawn to its bosom a population of freemen larger than Athens crowded within her historic gates, when her sons, under Miltiades, won liberty for mankind on the field of Marathon; more than Sparta contained when she ruled Greece, and sent forth her devoted children, quickened by a mother's benediction, to return with their shields, or on them; more than Rome gathered on her seven hills, when, under her kings, she commenced that sovereign sway, which afterward embraced the whole earth; more than London held, when on the fields of Crecy and Agincourt, the English banner was carried victoriously over chivalrous hosts of France.<sup>294</sup>

A final characteristic to be noted in this discussion is the frequent use of stock rhetorical devices. It is true that under a complete analysis of tropes and figures, every word, phrase, or expression fits into some category;<sup>295</sup> it is also true that the speaker has no monopoly upon these

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<sup>292</sup>John C. Calhoun, "Compromise Speech of 1850," Selected American Speeches on Basic Issues, ed. Carl G. Brandt and Edward M. Shafter, Jr. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960), pp. 56-58.

<sup>293</sup>Emerson, p. 279.

<sup>294</sup>Charles Sumner, "On the Crime against Kansas," Bryan, IX, 161-62.

<sup>295</sup>See Henry Peacham, The Garden of Eloquence (A facsimile reproduction with introduction by William G. Crane; Gainesville, Florida: Scholars Facsimiles & Reprints, 1954).

rhetorical devices; but it is also true that the speakers of this era demonstrated a remarkable propensity to employ certain of these devices. We shall consider the use of rhetorical question, exclamation, personification, and prosopopoeia.

The rhetorical question involves the asking of a question in which the response is either obvious or strongly implied. The answer may be supplied, but as often the reader or listener is expected to provide the response himself. As with all such devices, the ancients looked upon the rhetorical question as a form of argumentative development,<sup>296</sup> but such questions are normally used to build impact through repetition or added emphasis. The device was so used by Webster when he asked, "Where is the flag of the republic to remain? Where is the eagle still to tower? or is he to cower, and shrink, and fall to the ground?"<sup>297</sup> And when Calhoun queried:

Sir, can we forget the scene which was exhibited in this Chamber when that Expunging Resolution was first introduced here? Have we forgotten the universal giving away of conscience, so that the Senator from Missouri was left alone? I see before me senators who could not swallow that resolution; and has its nature changed since then? Is it any more constitutional now than it was then?<sup>298</sup>

Whether employed as a segment in a chain of reasoning or primarily as a means of intensification, rhetorical questions were sprinkled liberally through the speeches of this period.

The speaker was equally liberal in his use of exclamation, ecphonesis, the device of indicating vehement emotion with the use of emphatic inter-

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<sup>296</sup>Rhetorica ad Herennium, trans. Harry Caplan (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1954), iv. 26. 23.

<sup>297</sup>Daniel Webster, "Compromise Speech of 1850," Brandt and Shafter, p. 107.

<sup>298</sup>John C. Calhoun, "On the Expunging Resolution," Bryan, IX, 105.

jections.<sup>299</sup> The device appeared in almost all the speeches of the period, and printed versions of them were filled with punctuation indicating the vocal stress intended in remarks such as, "No, never--never!" In his famous debate with Webster, Hayne had recourse to exclamation. He alluded to the fact that of all the seamen imprisoned by Great Britain only eleven were from Massachusetts, saying, "Wonderful discovery!" He continued, "Massachusetts had lost but eleven! Eleven Massachusetts sailors taken by mistake! A cause of war, indeed!"<sup>300</sup> The example indicates that the exclamation might be extended far beyond the bare use of an emotional word or phrase.

The exclamation may be addressed in a general manner, as in the instances above, or it may be directed to someone or some thing. When specifically directed, and when extended, the exclamation easily develops into personification, "bestowing sensibility and voluntary motion upon things inanimate,"<sup>301</sup> and the related apostrophe, in which another person or object is addressed as if present.<sup>302</sup> Personification is a common figure of speech but speakers in nineteenth century America were inordinately fond of personifying anything and everything. Abstractions such as Death, Virtue, and Friendship were treated as concrete entities, and a speaker would say, "Philosophy was clothed with absolute power,"<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>299</sup>Thonssen and Baird, p. 421.

<sup>300</sup>Robert Hayne, "On the Foote Resolution," Bryan, IX, 18.

<sup>301</sup>Kames, p. 329.

<sup>302</sup>Kames, p. 341. Thonssen and Baird, p. 422.

<sup>303</sup>George Bancroft, "The People in Art, Government, and Religion," Bryan, VIII, 237.

and liberty and union almost invariably became Liberty and Union in printed speeches. Corwin's speech "On the Mexican War" was directed to the absent President. He repeatedly said, "Sir," asked questions of, "Mr. President," and spoke of having read about "your battle of Monterey."<sup>304</sup> This device was most used, however, in the occasional addresses of the day, and many of the commemorative orations were little more than extended apostrophes to departed heroes or remembered events.<sup>305</sup>

Prosopopoeia, the use of a constructed dialogue within a speech,<sup>306</sup> is closely related to apostrophe because no great leap is involved in moving from an address to the absent person to his being permitted to speak. The technique was popular—it is approached in Webster's peroration above—and it too seems to have been most used in occasional oratory. In his eulogy of Hamilton, Eliphalet Nott pictured the scene prior to the duel:

I imagine myself present in his chamber. . . . Various and moving objects pass before him and speak a dissuasive language. His country, which may need his counsels to guide, and his arm to defend, utters her veto. The partner of his youth, already covered with weeds, and whose tears flow down into her bosom, intercedes! His babes, stretching out their little hands and pointing to a weeping mother, with lisping eloquence, but eloquence which reaches a parent's heart, cry out, "Stay, stay, dear papa, and live for us!"<sup>307</sup>

Somewhat less maudlin, Wendell Phillips used prosopopoeia again and again in his eulogy of Toussaint L'Ouverture,<sup>308</sup> and his discussion of secession,

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<sup>304</sup>Thomas Corwin, "On the Mexican War," Bryan, IX, 123-36.

<sup>305</sup>See Sears, The Occasional Address.

<sup>306</sup>Thonssen and Baird, p. 423.

<sup>307</sup>Nott, p. 178.

<sup>308</sup>Wendell Phillips, "Toussaint L'Ouverture," American Speeches, pp. 311-32.



William Lloyd Garrison said:

Would to heaven they would go! It would only be the paupers clearing out from the town would it not? But, no, they do not mean to go; they mean to cling to you, and they mean to subdue you. But will you be subdued? I tell you our work is the dissolution of this slavery-cursed Union, if we would have a fragment of our liberties left to us! . . . How can two walk together except they be agreed? The slaveholder with his hands dripping in blood--will I make a compact with him? The man who plunders cradles--will I say to him, "Brother, let us walk together in unity"? The man, who, to gratify his lust or his anger, scourges woman with a lash till the soil is red with her blood--will I say to him: "Give me your hand; let us form a glorious Union"? No, never--never! There can be no union between us: "What concord hath Christ with Belial?" What union has freedom with slavery?<sup>309</sup>

Garrison's words provide a fitting closing example because the quotation includes all the devices which have been discussed. There are examples of rhetorical question, exclamation, personification, and protopopoeia. As has been said, these devices are not part of an inviolate province to which only the public speaker can turn; yet, they are part of the rhetorical tradition, most of them growing out of vocal presentation and representing the recognition of the presence of an audience.

Most aspects of delivery cannot be well presented through the use of any punctuation or typographic techniques, but as has been pointed out earlier, considerations of delivery were of paramount importance to the speakers and critics during this era. At the outset there was a physical problem because our contemporary electronic amplification was not available. The speaker was forced to be somewhat more vehement in order to accomplish the simple task of being heard. Moreover, impressive delivery was held in general esteem, being looked upon as another facet of the talent of the god-like orator. This can be noted in Mathews' evaluation of Clay because

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<sup>309</sup>William Lloyd Garrison, "On the Death of John Brown," Bryan, IX, 190.



he said, "He gesticulated all over. . . his arms, hands, fingers, feet, and even his spectacles and blue handkerchief, aided him in debate."<sup>310</sup>

Parker, describing a specific moment in a speech by Everett, wrote:

. . . with both fists absolutely clenched, and both arms raised on high, and his graceful figure growing almost angular with his energy, armed and eloquent at all points, he pealed forth as with a thousand trumpets.<sup>311</sup>

Another critic praised Webster's voice, saying, "It was deep, resonant, mellow, sweet, with a thunder roll in it which, when let out to its full power, was awe inspiring."<sup>312</sup> In a general observation, Parker wrote:

Some orators' pantomime is the perfect painting of their thoughts; in the prophetic expression glancing o'er their face like shadows on the summer's sea; in the discriminating gesture, each one telling its own story with perfect honesty; in the bodily bendings, appealing or enforcing, the whole story is told.<sup>313</sup>

There were voices of dissent, but the majority favored the more active and obvious delivery, a delivery characterized by much physical activity and a range in the display of vocal production. It was in keeping with the orator and the oratory of the period, with nationalism and optimism nurturing the exercise of free speech, with the promptings from the training in educational institutions, in short, with everything conspiring to make the orator and his speaking the objects of wonder and admiration.

The poet and his verse present a somewhat different picture. The factors which operated to enhance the position of the orator served to

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<sup>310</sup>Mathews, p. 312.

<sup>311</sup>Parker, p. 321.

<sup>312</sup>Oliver Dwyer, cited in Brandt and Shafter, p. 72.

<sup>313</sup>Parker, p. 252.

demean the position of the poet. The times which demanded the pamphlet and broadside, the Boston Massacre orations and the Constitutional Convention--these times demanded the literature of polemic, the literature of action. This is amply demonstrated by Moses Coit Tyler's Literary History of the American Revolution 1763-1783. The work is nothing if it is not the story of the agitation and debate over the struggle for independence. That struggle and continuing political exigencies called for service to the government, and poetic suffered because:

The United States no doubt possessed as large a percentage of men of talents as any other nation, but the effort needed to construct a new state channeled much of America's best talents into other than literary pursuits. There was far too much to know and to say about the rights of man, the nature of government, and the structure of society for men to deal exhaustively with the artistic aspect of life, too much to do to build a state to expend effort in making a poem.<sup>314</sup>

There is some overstatement in this quotation because there were constant efforts at "making a poem," but the generalization about the period is accurate. It was made during the period; in an 1840 anthology of poetry, the editor wrote:

American poetry has hitherto been little more than a happy accident, and seems to have arisen in spite of the practical tendencies of our country, and the prosaic character of our time. It has been produced mostly by minds devoted to sterner studies, and in brief intervals of leisure, snatched from more engrossing toils. The intellectual energy of our land, has as yet consecrated itself, perhaps too exclusively to the mighty work of preparing a spacious home for the thronging multitudes of our population, and building up for their protection, a great national polity. The main part of our poetical literature, therefore, has been occasional and fugitive.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>314</sup>Russel B. Nye, Cultural Life of the New Nation 1776-1830 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), p. 251.

<sup>315</sup>John Keese, ed., The Poets of America (New York: S. Colman, 1840), pp. 9-10.

These words not only demonstrate a contemporary awareness of the problem, they also carry the plaintive note which appeared in most of the anthologies. Self-conscious and proud as the editors may have been, they often apologized in their prefaces or in the biographies of individual authors. The men of letters knew that the hopes for a literary independence to match the political had not yet been realized, though the struggle was nearly as fierce as the military encounters.

Spencer introduces his study with the statement, "Almost from the beginning there was a sense of distinctive nationality,"<sup>316</sup> and he goes on to point out that the narrowly nationalistic foundations of Puritan literature were expanded in the latter half of the eighteenth century, " . . . and enlarged to accomodate a prophetic variety of American themes; and with this variety was nurtured the sense of literary self-sufficiency and independence."<sup>317</sup> The battle to produce a truly American literature, or any acceptable literature, continued through the first half of the nineteenth century, but literary genius:

. . . was slow to appear. There had been attempts to force it. Wild demands had been made, in the early years of the Republic. . . for a national literature so completely uncontaminated by England as to be written. . . in some other adopted tongue. Some attempts had been made, also, to present America with an epic. . . without which, it was then thought, no country could set up house in literature.<sup>318</sup>

Circumstances made the setting up of this house an imposing task, for the literary artist faced vicious obstacles. The failure to achieve agreement as to copyright protection was a hurdle never leaped during the

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<sup>316</sup>Spencer, p. 1.

<sup>317</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>318</sup>George S. Gordon, Anglo-American Literary Relations (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942), pp. 32-33.

period, with the result that the United States was flooded with cheap, pirated editions of British works.<sup>319</sup> George Gordon, in his study of literary relations between England and America, says:

There is abundant evidence, not only from the authors but from the publishers of America, that none but established American writers could compete with the current English literature scattered broadcast, at the lowest prices, through the country. And a nation whose literary beginners have no fair chance is unlikely to achieve great literature.<sup>320</sup>

Many of the imported works were adventure tales, and even the attempts to emulate the more serious literature from abroad were reflections which mirrored, not the original but the mirror itself. At the extreme was to develop the Dime Novel, hardly the creative enterprise which would foster a sensitive and imaginative poetic effort.

Another problem is directly related here, for the Dime Novel could have found an audience only among the literarily unsophisticated. Writing of the eighteenth century, Gordon remarks:

America's failure at this time to shine in poetry and belles-lettres was the natural consequence of provinciality. The English classics of the day were imported, bought, and imitated, but their urban tone was out of keeping with new societies in which leisure was yet unrecognized and which had no literary class.<sup>321</sup>

There is no reason to believe that this observation is not applicable to the audience which existed at any time prior to 1850. In literary taste, the audience reflected the taste which it had for all creative art, and the audience thrived on the sentimentality and natural wonders expressed in the Hudson River School of painting, the museums, the circuses, and

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<sup>319</sup>Ibid., pp. 22-23. Cf. Perry Miller The Raven and the Whale (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1956), pp. 88-103.

<sup>320</sup>Gordon, p. 94.

<sup>321</sup>Ibid., pp. 22-23.

toward the end of the period in the minstrels and showboats.<sup>322</sup> As De Tocqueville suggests, the society was most responsive to artistic constructs which were simple yet dramatic.<sup>323</sup> This was a time when the Noble Savage populated the American stage, and when Edwin Forrest became involved with Macready in a conflict which was to lead to the infamous Astor Place Riots, in 1849.<sup>324</sup>

Those riots serve to indicate the character of the audience, and they also focus attention upon the dilemma which the American artist faced in trying to escape English domination. Gordon says of the Americans:

Being now their own masters, they proposed to themselves, characteristically and most laudably, a simultaneous career of material and mental conquest; not only to get wealth, and subdue and populate the wilderness, but, wherever Europe excelled, to match or excel Europe. No American citizen could ever forget that his Republic had been born in defiance, and was still; in many ways, a challenge to the world. A challenge--and also, as he knew, an experiment hitherto untried, in the success or failure of which he and his fellow-citizens were involved.<sup>325</sup>

The foregoing is most important because it explains the typical American attitude of the time, a combination "of boundless confidence and pride in everything American with an almost morbid desire that this pride should be confirmed by outside, and if possible by English, commendation."<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>322</sup>Barnard Hewitt, Theatre U.S.A. 1668-1957 (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1959), pp. 33-160. Cf. Carl Wittke, Tambo and Bones, A History of the American Minstrel Stage (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1930).

<sup>323</sup>De Tocqueville, II, 66-90.

<sup>324</sup>Richard Moody, The Astor Place Riot (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1958).

<sup>325</sup>Gordon, pp. 31-32.

<sup>326</sup>Ibid., p. 32.



Championing freedom and independence, the Americans were almost forced to engage the English at their own game and to compete with the English models. Furthermore, while the doctrine of anarchy in art may be pleasant for the artist to contemplate, it means chaos for the critic, and this was a period when critical standards were of utmost importance.<sup>327</sup>

These standards caused conflict throughout the period, and there was some evolution, especially as the effects of Romanticism became stronger and the hold of the neo-classic spirit weakened, but William Charvatt discovered certain rather universal standards which were demanded by literary critics:

1. The first of these is the critics conception of his function: He thought of himself as the watch dog of society.
2. Literature must not condone rebellion of any kind against the existing social and economic order.
3. Literature must not contain anything derogatory, implicitly or explicitly, to religious ideals and moral standards.
4. Literature should be optimistic: It should not condone philosophical pessimism or skepticism.
5. Literature should deal with the intelligible, not the mystical or obscure.
6. Literature should be social in point of view, not egocentric.<sup>328</sup>

These principles are anti-Romantic, and although they did not escape examination and debate, they dominated and shaped Romanticism in time, for as Spencer says, "As the Civil War approached. . . the romantic impulse tended either to be narrowed into sectional piety or to be

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<sup>327</sup>Charvat.

<sup>328</sup>Ibid., pp. 7-26.



transmuted into a zealous humanitarianism."<sup>329</sup>

Unquestionably these standards limited the poet in his choice of subject and manner of its development, since they constitute a series of critical prescriptions. In one sense it appears that the poet was forced into the area of rhetorical enterprise, and so he was, but only in a most limited, restricted fashion. He could write about approved topics in an approved manner. His freedom of choice was a qualified freedom, and it was made so by the same theorists who dominated rhetorical criticism, the Scots, most especially Blair and Kames, for despite any influx of Romanticism, these two remained the ascendant stars of literary criticism, and of their influence Charvat says:

Their names were, at one time or another, on the lips of almost every American critic, and well they might be, for the works of these men were almost household books in America.<sup>330</sup>

Their insistence that literature should inculcate moral virtue is responsible, in part, for the semi-rhetorical goals of poetry expressed in the dicta listed by Charvat. Earlier in this essay, it was noted that these theorists blurred the distinctions which might be drawn between rhetoric and poetic on the basis of language structure, and this leads directly to a further complication. It resides in the fact that most of the poetry written in this era was produced by professional men, by physicians, ministers, and lawyers. These were the people who had time to write poetry, and in spite of some growing worship of the untutored genius, these were the people who wrote poetry. They were college graduates who had learned the rules of composition for both poetry and oratory from the

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<sup>329</sup>Spencer, p. 100. Cf. George Boas, ed., Romanticism in America (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961), pp. 191-202.

<sup>330</sup>Charvat, p. 26.

same textbooks.<sup>331</sup> Given this background, it would be most surprising to find poetry which differed radically from the oratory of the period.

One can hardly turn a page of an anthology of the poetry without encountering the same optimism and patriotic fervor which typified the oratory.<sup>332</sup> There were poems in honor of the Pilgrims, the early settlers, and, of course, the flag. "Heroes of the Revolution,"<sup>333</sup> "The Western Emigrant,"<sup>334</sup> and "Battle-ground of Denonville"<sup>335</sup> were typical titles. Also typical was the optimism which colored lines dedicated to patriot or patriotic occasion, and as suggested in Charvat's inquiry, this optimism was spread as an overlay upon almost all of the poetry, often in combination with some moral lesson from the author.<sup>336</sup> N. P. Willis wrote in "Thoughts While Making a Grave for a First Child, Born Dead:"

When the smile  
Steals to her pallid lip again, and spring  
Wakes its buds above thee, we will come,  
And, standing by thy music-haunted grave,  
Look on each other cheerfully, and say,  
A child that we have loved is gone to heaven,  
And by this gate of flowers she pass's away.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>331</sup>Bigelow, pp. 40-47. Cf. Leon Howard, The Connecticut Wits (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943).

<sup>332</sup>The examples below come from three anthologies, Charles W. Everest, ed., The Poets of Connecticut (Hartford: Case, Tiffany and Burnham, 1843; Rufus W. Griswold, ed., The Poets and Poetry of America (Philadelphia: Moss, Brother & Co., 1860); John Keese, ed., The Poets of America (New York: S. Colman, 1840). These will be cited below as FC, FPA, and PA.

<sup>333</sup>Davis Humphreys, "Heroes of the Revolution," FC, pp. 65-68.

<sup>334</sup>Lydia H. Sigourney, "The Western Emigrant," FC, pp. 205-207.

<sup>335</sup>W. H. C. Hosmer, "Battle-ground of Denonville," FPA, p. 509.

<sup>336</sup>Charvat, pp. 17-21.

<sup>337</sup>N. P. Willis, "Thoughts while Making a Grave for a First Child, Born Dead," FPA, p. 379.

Similarly, Park Benjamin offered solace in "Lines Spoken by a Blind Boy:"

Now, since I've learn'd to read and write,  
My Heart is fill'd with new delight;  
And music too,—can there be found  
A sight so beautiful as sound?  
Tell me, kind friends, in one short word,  
Am I not like a captive bird?  
I live in song, and peace, and joy,—  
Though blind, a merry-hearted boy.<sup>338</sup>

The moralizing in these poems runs counter to the more purely Romantic tendency. From the Romantic movement came the stress upon the emotion itself--the emotion in an individual response to an idea or situation, particularly as observed in nature, but in America at this time, the lines or odes to withered leaves, the Hudson River, or to hunter and waterfowl carried a moral lesson for all to learn.

The moralizing also crept into the occasional poems, many of which were written during this era. The poet often created his verse for and recited it at a specific occasion, as is indicated by the titles, "For a Celebration of the Massachusetts Mechanics' Charitable Association,"<sup>339</sup> "The Twenty Thousand Children of the Sabbath-schools in New York, Celebrating Together the Fourth of July, 1839,"<sup>340</sup> and "Lines Occasioned by the Debate in the United States' Senate on the Oregon Bill."<sup>341</sup> Although their titles do not so indicate, there are other poems which are limited to a specific time, place, and audience, a general characteristic of rhetorical utterance.

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<sup>338</sup>Park Benjamin, "Lines Spoken by a Blind Boy," PPA, p. 440.

<sup>339</sup>John Pierpont, "For a Celebration of the Massachusetts Mechanics' Charitable Association," PPA, p. 100.

<sup>340</sup>William B. Tappan, "The Twenty Thousand Children of the Sabbath-schools in New York, Celebrating Together the Fourth of July, 1839," PPA, p. 199.

<sup>341</sup>J. E. Down, "Lines Occasioned by the Debate in the United States' Senate on the Oregon Bill," PC, pp. 380-82.

In at least one significant aspect, however, the poetry of this age was very unlike rhetorical endeavor. The prose-verse distinction was much in evidence. Even though the Scots were not clear in their discussions of the differences between poetry and prose, they insisted that rhyme and metre were essential features of poetry, and the age demanded that poetry be composed in verse form. The poets obeyed this critical dictum, and their poetry was written in some traditional pattern of metre and rhyme. As evidence of the importance attached to the use of the proper form, we can turn to Rufus W. Griswold's comments about the poetry of James G. Percival. Griswold found it worth remarking that Percival's final volume of poetry "embraces more than one hundred and fifty varieties of measure, and its contents generally show his familiar acquaintance with the poetical art."<sup>342</sup> The orator might strive for embellishment and seek out the bookish term, but his language was always prose; his orations never approached the rigid verse patterns.

Of course the poet was addicted to an ornate style, and the poetry reveals a penchant for the poetic term, studied diction, and archaic usage. There was hardly a poem which did not contain a "yon," "o'er," "e'er," or "mid," and we encounter:

Mid yon rich clouds' voluptuous pile,  
Methinks some spirit of the air  
Might rest to gaze below awhile,  
Then turn to bathe and revel there.<sup>343</sup>

One poem from the period is with us today in the song, "The Old Oaken Bucket," and in the second stanza the poet had written:

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<sup>342</sup>Griswold, PPA, p. 219.

<sup>343</sup>A. Norton, "Scene after a Summer Shower," PA, p. 113.

That moss-cover'd vessel I hail'd as a treasure.  
 For often at noon, when return'd from the field,  
 I found it the source of an exquisite pleasure,  
 The purest and sweetest that nature can yield.  
 How ardent I seized it, with hands that were glowing,  
 And quick to the white-pebbled bottom it fell;  
 And soon, with the emblem of truth overflowing,<sup>344</sup>

The writer, Samuel Woodworth, considered himself the poet of the common people, but his usages are sometimes far removed from colloquial expression.

In addition to a gilding of the lily, there is an amazing predictability in much of the verse, for there were certain words and expressions which appeared with remarkable regularity. The poetry was replete with "mournful cadences," "melancholy dirges," "sylvan vales," and "shaded bowers," and many of the poems contained stanzas which seem to have been nothing more than minor variations on a theme. Typical are three from Willis G. Clark's "The Burial-Place at Laurel Hill:"

There is an emblem in this peaceful scene;  
 Soon rainbow colours on the woods will fall,  
 And autumn gusts bereave the hills of green,  
 As sinks the year to meet its cloudy pall.

Then, cold and pale, in distant vistas round,  
 Disrobed and tuneless, all the woods will stand.  
 While the chain'd streams are silent as the ground,  
 As Death had numb'd them with his icy hand.

Yet, when the warm, soft winds shall rise in spring,  
 Like struggling daybeams o'er a blasted heath,  
 The bird return'd shall poise her golden wing.  
 And liberal Nature break the spell of Death.<sup>345</sup>

The gentle, reflective mood of these lines was reflected endlessly, as was the euphuistic style. This style is most evident in the choice of words and in the inversion of the more natural sentence structure.

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<sup>344</sup>Samuel Woodworth, "The Bucket," PPA, p. 105.

<sup>345</sup>Willis G. Clark, "The Burial-Place at Laurel Hill," PPA, p. 451.



The most embellished passages occurred in the more vehement modes, especially in the patriotic themes, and the flag was addressed:

Child of the Sun! to thee 'tis given  
 To guard the banner of the free,  
 To hover in the sulphur smoke,  
 To ward away the battle-stroke  
 And bid its blendings shine afar,  
 Like rainbows on the cloud of war,  
 The harbingers of victory.<sup>346</sup>

The attempts to provide epic poetry in America produced striking examples of careful attention to words and structure. James A. Hillhouse wrote:

Now, o'er the mount the radiant legions hung.  
 Like plummy travellers from climes remote  
 On some sequester'd isle about to stoop.  
 Gently its flowery head received the throne;  
 Cherubs and seraphs, by ten thousands, round  
 Skirting it far and wide, like a bright sea,  
 Fair forms and faces, crowns, and coronets,  
 And glistering wings furl'd white and numberless  
 About their Lord were those seven glorious spirits  
 Who in the Almighty's presence stand. Four lean'd  
 On golden wands, with folded wings, and eyes  
 Fixed on the throne: One bore the dreadful books,  
 The arbiters of Life: another waved  
 The blazing ensign terrible, of yore,  
 To rebel angels in the wards of heaven:  
 What seem'd a trump the other spirit grasp'd,  
 Of wondrous size, wreathed multiiform and strange.<sup>347</sup>

Thus, although he operated within the restrictions imposed by conventions, the poet exhibited the tendency to employ unusual words and diction. He was like the orator in this respect, and he was like the orator in his use of the stock rhetorical devices. Many of the poems were addressed to a person, to an aspect of nature, or to an abstract idea. It was natural that questions be asked in the course of these addresses, and it followed that poet turned to the use of rhetorical questions. He asked

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<sup>346</sup>J. R. Drake, "The American Flag," PA, p. 48.

<sup>347</sup>James A. Hillhouse, "The Judgment," FPA, p. 132.

of the song sparrow:

Did the green isles  
 Detain thee long? or, 'mid the palmy groves  
 Of the bright south, where liberty now smiles,  
 Didst sing thy loves?<sup>348</sup>

He might ask of Napoleon, as J. Pierpont did, whether a voice came from Europe, "A voice that bids the world to be awed to mourn him?"<sup>349</sup> or he might ask of a river:

Whence do thy waters flow?  
 And whither art thou roaming,  
 So pensive and so slow?<sup>350</sup>

In the poem which furnished the last example, the poet had the river reply, and this leads to the use of personification and prosopopeia. We have seen examples in the discussion above, for death and nature have been personified and the American flag addressed, and additional illustrations are easily found. William Wallace composed a dialogue between trees and the moon in "The Mounds of America,"<sup>351</sup> and H. P. Gould was fond of using the dialogue form, as in his "The Pebble and the Acorn."<sup>352</sup> In a poem devoted to matters of love and reason, one stanza reads:

He went. The dame was busy with  
 Her wonted round of freakish fancies;  
 At length, thought she, "I'll go and see  
 How Cupid with the nymph advances."  
 The night was rough. Said Venus, "Sure  
 They'll not be out this stormy weather:  
 The door not fast? within there, ho!"<sup>353</sup>  
 Reason and Love had fled together.

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<sup>348</sup>H. Pickering, "To the Fringilla Melodia," PA, p. 191.

<sup>349</sup>J. Pierpont, "Napoleon at Rest," PA, p. 151.

<sup>350</sup>Samuel G. Goodrich, "The River," PPA, p. 233.

<sup>351</sup>William Wallace, "The Mounds of America," PPA, p. 554.

<sup>352</sup>H. P. Gould, "The Pebble and the Acorn," PA, pp. 68-70. Cf. "The Frost," PA, pp. 105-106.

<sup>353</sup>George Hill, "Love and Reason," PC, p. 285. Cf. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Skeleton in Armour," PPA, p. 357.

But for all the use of rhetorical questions or prosopopoeia, the poet was most addicted to the exclamation and apostrophe. The pages of verse were covered with exclamation points, as the poets launched forth, "Woe! to the land though tramplest o'er,"<sup>354</sup> "God of the glorious Lyre!"<sup>355</sup> "Fine humble-bee! Fine humble-bee!"<sup>356</sup> or "Primeval Night! infinitude of gloom!"<sup>357</sup> As Bigelow points out, much of this verse is epidiectic;<sup>358</sup> It is poetry of praise or blame, usually the former, and the eulogies of virtues, patriots and patriotism, and natural phenomena were punctuated with words and phrases that ring through the years. In addressing the working man, William D. Gallagher wrote:

These are thine enemies--thy worst;  
They chain thee to thy lowly lot:  
They labour and thy life accursed.  
O, stand erect! and from them burst!  
And longer suffer not!

Thou art thyself thine enemy!  
The great--what better they than thou?  
As theirs, is not thy will as free?<sup>359</sup>

Henry Tuckerman began his sonnet "Freedom":

Freedom! beneath thy banner I was born--  
Oh let me share thy full and perfect life!  
Teach me opinion's slavery to scorn,  
And to be free from passion's bitter strife.<sup>360</sup>

The first lines of Bayard Taylor's "Kilimandjaro" read:

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<sup>354</sup>Prosper M. Wetmore, "Lexington," PC, p. 302.

<sup>355</sup>Charles Sprague, "Shakespeare Ode," PA, p. 153.

<sup>356</sup>Ralph Waldo Emerson, "To the Humble-bee," PAA, p. 300.

<sup>357</sup>Ralph Hoyt, "The Blacksmith's Night," PAA, p. 446.

<sup>358</sup>Bigelow, pp. 48-59.

<sup>359</sup>William D. Gallagher, "The Labourer," PAA, p. 414.

<sup>360</sup>Henry T. Tuckerman, "Freedom," PAA, p. 504.

Hail to thee, monarch of African mountains,  
 Remote, inaccessible, silent, and lone--  
 Who, from the heart of tropical fevers,  
 Lifest to heaven thine alien snows,  
 Feeding forever the fountains that make thee  
 Father of Nile and Creator of Egypt;<sup>361</sup>

The foregoing examples conclude the survey of poetry from the first half of the nineteenth century in America. The examination has been less extensive than the survey of rhetoric, but no evaluation is implied. There was no reason to repeat the discussion of the factors which were operative in shaping the climate of attitudes because they were considered earlier. The time, training, and custom encouraged the production of poetry which, aside from the adherence to structural patterns, tended to move to and within the rhetorical tradition, and the poet was almost forced to attempt to emulate the orator. The relationships between rhetoric and poetic in the era will now be examined with specific reference to the criteria of creator, purpose, subject, form, authorial presence, and mode.

Creator. Throughout this study it has been repeated that rhetorical theory has always demanded that the best speakers have some natural talent, but that emphasis in training has been upon a systematic method of study. The centering upon systematic study is implicit in any program which purports to teach by precept, and all influential rhetorical treatises have supported such a method for training speakers. On the other hand, the poet customarily has been looked upon as one who creates his poetry in response to some inner, inspired motivation, and he has most often been portrayed as one whose endeavors are the products of genius.

We have seen that this basis for differentiating between orator and poet was blurred during the first half of the nineteenth century in

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<sup>361</sup> Bayard Taylor, "Kilimandjaro," PAA, p. 606.

America. The poet retained his traditional status of genius, but the orator came to be regarded as a creative genius whose eloquence was as much a product of inspiration as was the verse of the poet. For this orator, "the common air is full of Delphick incense," and "burning passion" makes his rhetoric "a Whirlwind, and his logic, fire." Critics of both oratory and poetry frequently lamented that the creative artists failed to achieve the zenith in their efforts, but there was never any doubt about the fact that the primary impetus came from an inspired genius when the zenith was attained. In this period, then, the traditional distinction between poet and orator made on the basis of their talents was not observed, for the orator was assigned the role usually reserved to the poet.

Purpose. The breaking down of distinctions between orator and poet as creator naturally carried over into any analysis of purpose. In the ancient duality of teaching and pleasing, rhetoric traditionally has stressed teaching; poetry has emphasized pleasing. However, the fact that we can refer to the duality of teaching and pleasing indicates resistance to a hard and fast separation between rhetoric and poetic on the basis of purpose. Even though the eighteenth century speculation had emphasized the pleasure to be derived from poetry, nineteenth century America clung to the prescriptions of Kames and Elair, and as Charvat shows, those standard stressed didacticism in poetry.<sup>362</sup> To give pleasure was a part of the poet's function, but it was equally important that he support the social and economic status quo. Extending into the area of morality, this persuasive function assigned to the poet broke with tradition,

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<sup>362</sup>Charvat, pp. 59-110.



for with equal attention accorded teaching and pleasing, the poet was asked to fill the role of orator.

Similarly, the orator found that his speeches must have a two-fold purpose. To be sure, teaching or persuading were of utmost importance, but the orator was as often judged for his ability to give pleasure. Viewed as a form of entertainment, his performance was evaluated as a theatrical endeavor, and the text of his speech was regularly submitted to an analysis of style, quite apart from considerations of the rhetorical situation. As a result, the orator was forced to traffic in the goals of the poet, and the blurring of purpose was complete. There has always been the degree of overlapping in this area, but in this period real distinctions disappeared.

Subject. In this essay there has been no specific discussion of the themes which attracted speaker and poet, though the topics have been touched upon by implication. It goes without saying that the United States offered as many speaking situations as might be imagined; perhaps a few more. Some of the myriad possibilities were suggested in the consideration of speaking opportunities which the orator encountered. He was thrust into areas of discussion and debate which must always characterize a democratic society, and these were limitless areas. On the grander scale were matters of slavery, territorial expansion, currency, and internal improvements, but problems at the local level were enough, for any speaker, and he found few restrictions imposed.

The inordinately large number of occasional poems written in the period might lead to the conclusion that the poet enjoyed a similar freedom, but he did not. The hymns to graduating classes and the odes to battlefields were limited to the specifics of the rhetorical situation,

but more importantly they tended to fall into the area of epideictic verse. Normally they were paeans of praise, and there were few poems which came to grips with controversial topics or which challenged the accepted values of the society. Wilfred Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est" would have been unthinkable in that day.

The vast majority of the poems treated of the stock poetic themes. Many were written about abstract virtues such as friendship, industry, chastity, resignation, patriotism, or cheerfulness. Such virtues were often praised in conjunction with thoughts on death, for the graveyard genre was in evidence. Most popular, however, were the poems about nature. Every possibility from the familiar to the most dramatic was explored, as is indicated by the examples cited earlier in this essay. Custom and critical dicta restricted the poets to these materials and prohibited the breadth of choice known to the poets of the twentieth century. Consequently, the blurring of distinctions between rhetoric and poetic as regards subject is somewhat superficial. The poet frequently wrote occasion poems, but he did not enjoy the freedom of the orator. The conventional distinction remained in force for the most part.

Form. The most rigid adherence to tradition is to be found in the consideration of form. Both speaker and poet of the period demonstrated a particular interest in style insofar as they committed themselves to a copious and periphrastic structure and to the use of studied words and terms, but at the same time, the time honored identification of poetry with verse and oratory with prose was not trespassed. Purple passages abounded in speeches and poems, but the poet composed in verse, the orator in prose, and this was so much an accepted pattern that a critic might commend a poet who had demonstrated a facility with a variety of

verse forms. This, then, is one area in which even a superficial blurring of distinction between rhetoric and poetic did not occur. Metre and rhyme remained the tools of the poet.

Authorial presence. The style of composition which is characterized as periphrastic and inflated may seem somewhat indirect from the point of view of the audience, and while this was the style employed by the speakers we are discussing, the audience was addressed in the customary manner. The speech texts indicate that the speakers used first person address and were quite aware of the immediate factors in the speaking situation, such things as time, place, and occasion. There is evidence that speakers went to great lengths to prepare themselves for just such references.<sup>363</sup> In short, the speaker tended to tell his audiences rather than show them. There were times when the speaker became less direct, moving in the direction of showing. This happened in extended descriptions that become a kind of verbal portraiture, as in Sumner's eulogy of Kansas, for the movement of ideas can become arrested and the audience asked to enjoy the picture for its own merits. Similarly, proscopopoesia and apostrophe may have added dramatic impact, but both devices shift the point of view and make for less direct contact between speaker and audience. Customarily, however, the speaker took the direct, first person approach, and he maintained the distinction between rhetoric and poetic on the basis of authorial presence.

Nevertheless, the distinction was not consistently operative, for the poet frequently wrote from the first person point of view, and he

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<sup>363</sup>Ronald F. Reid, "Edward Everett: Rhetorician of Nationalism, 1824-55," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLII (October, 1956), pp. 273-282. See studies in Brigance, ed., History and Criticism.

often suggested the same orientation. The occasional poems were normally addressed directly to the audience in the fashion utilized by a speaker. Furthermore, poems in which the communication was addressed to an object or an idea were often constructed in a style which gravitated toward the usages of the orator. The narrator was seldom effaced. His presence intruded, and this made for a movement in the direction of the face-to-face, audience-speaker relationships. The tendency was enhanced by the use of rhetorical questions and other stock rhetorical devices because, as has been mentioned, these techniques indicate an awareness of an interpreting intelligence on the part of the creator and further indicate that he is attempting to establish a direct line of communication. In utilizing these patterns of usage, the poet moved away from showing toward telling and toward the rhetorical orientation of public address. Once again the line of differentiation between rhetoric and poetic became less determinate.

Mode. In the realm of ethical appeal, the speaker of the era had no choice but to operate in traditional fashion. Speaking to controversial topics and in the area of the contingent, he asked for acceptance of his beliefs and judgments, and those elements which go to make up the impression of the speaker's character were, as they always have been, matters of concern for both orator and critic. For a specific example we can turn to the reaction to Webster's "Seventh of March Speech." He was excoriated not so much for any faulty reasoning or logical failing, but primarily because of the shift which he made in his position.

The standards of ethical proof also made their way into poetic, and the poet and his work were subjected to these standards of evaluation. Not only was it important that the poet support the political and social

status quo in his poetry, but it was expected that he should do so out of conviction, a conviction reflected in his private and public life. The poet was to be the good man writing well. Some adverse criticism of Byron and Poe during the period stemmed from just this critical posture.

In addition to responding to the general critical framework, the critic was almost required to consider ethical proof. Since the poet was usually concerned with telling rather than showing, he left little room for interpretation on the part of the reader. The reader was given an observation and a conclusion, not the picture of a scene in which the narrator was effaced and from which the individual was invited to draw his own conclusions. He was told, "This is my reaction. You accept it." The method immediately exposed the personality and intelligence of the creator as a factor in evaluation.

The role of personality must be taken into account in a complete analysis of oratory or poetry, but the more directly the audience is addressed by the creator, the more significant a consideration it becomes. The American poet of this period so engaged the audience, and it resulted in yet one more blurred criterion in the attempt to distinguish rhetoric from poetic.

We have seen, then, that in most areas discussed the poet and the orator of the period drifted toward a common ground. It is true that the historical distinctions on the bases of form and subject were maintained, but in the areas of creator, purpose, authorial presence, and mode there was a marked tendency toward a merging in linguistic communication. This leads to a conclusion in regard to the impact of the rhetorical tradition upon all poetry of the period. In the light of what has preceded, it seems safe to say that all poets were indebted to the tradition, whether the indebtedness is acknowledged or not. The threads of relationship



between rhetoric and poetic were so interwoven that no poet could have escaped the influence of rhetorical theory and practice. Thus, even if this study were to be terminated here, it could be assumed that the tradition had influenced the production of Leaves of Grass. Of course, Whitman had more than a casual interest in the tradition, and that interest will be examined more closely in the next essay.

## WALT WHITMAN AND THE RHETORICAL TRADITION

Before we apply the six criteria in a discussion of Walt Whitman and his poetry, it will be instructive to give further attention to the more obvious manifestations of Whitman's association with the rhetorical tradition. This will provide a background which should clarify the examination of the relationships between rhetoric and poetic. Evidence for this preliminary analysis is scattered through the writing by and about Whitman, and in order to provide a sharper critical focus, this evidence will be considered in relation to rhetorical practice, rhetorical theory, and rhetorical criticism.

We know that throughout his life Whitman was interested in the practice of public speaking, but that his actual experience was not especially extensive. In his later years he testified to having been active in a Brooklyn debating society in his youth,<sup>364</sup> and it has been established that he was a regular participant in the programs of the Smithtown Debating Society during the winter of 1837-38.<sup>365</sup> He also took part in a public debate during the wild presidential campaign of 1840. The mythology has it that Whitman leaped up to respond to a speech by Daniel Webster, but in truth, he debated one John Gunn several days after

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<sup>364</sup>Complete Writings, ed. Bucke, Harned, and Traubel, IV, 19; IX, 49-57. Cited below as CW.

<sup>365</sup>Katherine Molinoff, An Unpublished Whitman Manuscript: The Record Book of the Smithtown Debating Society, 1837-1838 ("Monographs on Unpublished Whitman Material," No. 1; New York: Comet Press, 1941).

Webster's appearance at Jamaica.<sup>366</sup> Other speaking appearances included a speech at a Democratic rally in New York, in 1841,<sup>367</sup> one before the Brooklyn Art Union, in 1851,<sup>368</sup> and presentations of a lecture about Lincoln.<sup>369</sup> This list of performances is not an impressive one, but it does indicate an interest, and there is additional evidence of the interest.

Testifying in 1888, Whitman said:

When I was much younger--way back: in the Brooklyn days--and even behind Brooklyn--I was to be an orator--to go about the country spouting my pieces, proclaiming my faith.<sup>370</sup>

His brother, George, who lived with Walt in Brooklyn during the early fifties remembered:

I guess it was about those years he had an idea he could lecture. He wrote what mother called "barrels" of lectures. We did not know what he was writing. He did not seem more abstracted than usual.<sup>371</sup>

It is probable that this interest was at least stimulated by Whitman's desire to emulate the "Master," Ralph Waldo Emerson, and take to the

<sup>366</sup> Joseph J. Rubin, "Whitman in 1840: A Discovery" American Literature, VIII (March, 1937), pp. 239-41.

<sup>367</sup> The Uncollected Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman, ed. Emory Holloway (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1921), I, 51. Cited below as UPP.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., pp. 241-47.

<sup>369</sup> Gay Wilson Allen, The Solitary Singer (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1955), pp. 483-84, 491-92, 524-25.

<sup>370</sup> Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden (Boston: Small, Maynard & Co., 1906), I, 5. Cited below as WWC.

<sup>371</sup> In Re Walt Whitman, ed. Horace L. Traubel, Richard M. Bucke, and Thomas B. Harned (Philadelphia: Davis McKay, 1893), p. 35. Cited below as In Re.

lyceum platform.<sup>372</sup> In any event, Whitman sketched the outlines for a number of varied lectures,<sup>373</sup> and even designed a poster which was to announce his appearances.<sup>374</sup> He wrote to an unidentified correspondent about his plans, saying:

I have thought, for some time past, of beginning the use of myself as a public speaker, teacher, or lecturer. (This, after I get out the next issue of my "Leaves.")<sup>375</sup>

This letter dates from 1857, and it was during the late fifties that his interest in lecturing was most intense. During those years he wrote to himself:

Lessons--Clear, alive, luminous,--full of facts, full of physiology--acknowledging the democracy, the people--must have an alert character, even in the reading of them. The enclosing theory of "Lessons" to permeate all the States. . . . Also the Strength, Command and Luxuriance of Oratory.<sup>376</sup>

Whitman never became the wandering orator, but he continued to contemplate this possible career for a number of years.<sup>377</sup> Similarly, Whitman maintained a lifelong interest in another aspect of public address, declamation.

There is a paucity of information available about Whitman's career as student and teacher, but we can be certain that he both studied and

<sup>372</sup>Walt Whitman of the New York Aurora, ed. Joseph J. Rubin and Charles H. Brown (State College, Pennsylvania: Bald Eagle Press, 1950), pp. 10, 105. Cited below as Aurora.

<sup>373</sup>Walt Whitman's Workshop, ed. Furness. Cited below as WWW. Also see CW, IX, 166-230.

<sup>374</sup>Allen, Walt Whitman, p. 67.

<sup>375</sup>Walt Whitman, The Correspondence 1842-1867, ed. Edwin H. Miller (New York: New York University Press, 1961), 13. Reference is to item number. Cited below as Corres.

<sup>376</sup>CW, IX, 8-9.

<sup>377</sup>Corres., 52; CW, IX, 175-87.

taught oral reading. The reading class was a part of the educational system, and the activity became a habitual practice with Whitman. In Specimen Days he recalled:

Those same later years, also, while living in Brooklyn, (1836--'50) I went regularly every week in the mild seasons down to Coney Island, at that time a long, bare unfrequented shore, which I had all to myself, and where I loved, after bathing, to race up and down the hard sand, and declaim Homer or Shakespere to the surf and sea-gulls by the hour.<sup>378</sup>

He confessed to Horace Traubel that he considered the declamation part of his training for oratory, saying that he had "spouted in the woods, down by the shore, in the noise of Broadway where nobody could hear me: spouted, eternally spouted, and spouted again."<sup>379</sup> He remembered declaiming passages from Julius Caesar and Richard III while riding the Broadway omnibuses,<sup>380</sup> and the degree to which he indulged in the practice of oral reading is indicated by a note in which he worried, "I have fallen into a serious fault of too strong and frequent emphasis from repeating the Shakespearean passages Caesar & Richard 3d."<sup>381</sup> Apparently his concern did not quell his interest in declamation, however, for he wrote that he read and recited for the soldiers in the Washington hospitals, and said, "They were very fond of it, and like declamatory poetical pieces."<sup>382</sup> One of his notebooks held a collection of his favorite readings,<sup>383</sup> and in 1877 he wrote of a walk in the woods during which,

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<sup>378</sup>CW, IV, 16-17.

<sup>379</sup>WWC, I, 5.

<sup>380</sup>CW, IV, 24.

<sup>381</sup>WWW, p. 35.

<sup>382</sup>CW, IV, 87; Corres., 211.

<sup>383</sup>"Ten Notebooks," pp. 26-29.



" . . . for addition and variety I launch forth in my vocalism; shout declamatory pieces, sentiments, sorrow, anger, &c., from the stock poets or plays."<sup>384</sup> Thus Whitman developed an interest in public speaking in his youth and maintained that interest throughout his life. Although much of his practice was of a private sort and although he attained no renown as a speaker, lecturer, or reader, his continuing interest in these activities is significant. It indicates an abiding interest in the rhetorical tradition. We can learn more about the character of that interest by considering the evidence which relates to Whitman's exposure to rhetorical theory.

Whitman's formal schooling was meager; consequently he was deprived of the opportunity to meet with the theories of rhetoric which were so much a part of the educational system. Furthermore, there is nothing to indicate that he gained a thorough knowledge of rhetorical theory at any time in his life. Nowhere in his voluminous writings is there a reference to any of the well-known theorists. Nowhere is there a coherent, developed statement of rhetorical theory. His lack of knowledge here was inadvertently underlined in some remarks about the accomplishments of Joseph Priestley. Describing the Englishman's talents and achievements, Whitman failed to mention the popular rhetorical treatise which Priestley had written.<sup>385</sup> In various places Whitman did allude to the teaching of speech,<sup>386</sup> but the only facet of rhetorical theory in which he demonstrated any degree of familiarity was the province of elocution.

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<sup>384</sup>CW, IV, 173.

<sup>385</sup>CW, IX, 129.

<sup>386</sup>CW, VI, 113-14, 264-65.

We can only guess as to what Whitman read in his brief career as a student, but we can be fairly certain that he was exposed to oral reading and elocution theory. We can be completely certain about his having taught oral reading at Smithtown,<sup>387</sup> and he undoubtedly taught similar courses in his other teaching positions. The Smithtown records show that while Whitman taught there several readers were used,<sup>388</sup> and while some of them make no mention of elocution theory, the school used Lindley Murray's English Reader.<sup>389</sup> Primarily an anthology, as were many of the elocution manuals, Murray's book was amazingly popular, so popular in fact that an editor of one of the readers used at the school referred to the English Reader as "the book most generally in use in the schools of this country."<sup>390</sup>

Acknowledging an indebtedness to Blair,<sup>391</sup> Murray included nine pages of material devoted to the principles of good reading, and at the outset of his discussion he wrote:

To give rules for the management of the voice in reading, by which the necessary pauses, emphasis, and tones, may be discovered and put in practice, is not possible.<sup>392</sup>

Having rejected a formulary approach, Murray based his analysis upon the idea of empathic response to the literature being read because:

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<sup>387</sup>Katherine Molinoff, Whitman's Teaching at Smithtown, 1837-1838 ("Monographs on Unpublished Whitman Material," No. 3; New York: Comet Press, 1942), p. 16.

<sup>388</sup>Ibid., pp. 18-19.

<sup>389</sup>Ibid. For further discussion of Murray's book see Robb, pp. 26-27.

<sup>390</sup>Lyman Cobb, Cobb's Sequel to the Juvenile Reader (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1834), p. iv.

<sup>391</sup>Murray, p. 4.

<sup>392</sup>Ibid.

It is essential to a complete reader, that he minutely perceive the ideas, and enter into the feelings of the author, whose sentiments he professes to repeat: for how is it possible to represent clearly to others, what we have but faint or inaccurate conception of ourselves?<sup>393</sup>

The same philosophy was re-emphasized throughout, and Murray concluded his discussion of emphasis:

In order to acquire the proper management of the emphasis, the great rule to be given is, that the reader study to attain a just conception of the force and spirit of the sentiments which he is to pronounce. For to lay the emphasis with exact propriety, is a constant exercise of good sense and attention. . . . and must arise from feeling delicately ourselves.<sup>394</sup>

Both statements are worth the repeating because they illustrate an attitude that Whitman accepted and embraced, an attitude typified by the advice, "Be natural."

Murray and other elocutionists rejected as artificial the teaching of physical and vocal patterns, contending instead that the proper stimulus for oral reading was provided by a complete understanding of the material coupled with a deep and sympathetic emotional response.<sup>395</sup>

In public address, this philosophy was reflected in the belief that the speaker will reveal his true feeling for his cause, the belief that only the sincere speaker appears sincere. A concomitant development is that such sincerity cannot be taught; it is too much the natural expression of personality and commitment. Consequently, it is inherently superior to any system of rote schooling.

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<sup>393</sup>Ibid., p. 9. Cf. his Introduction to the English Reader (Philadelphia: Kinber & Sharpless, 1827), pp. iii-iv, v-xi.

<sup>394</sup>Murray, English Reader, p. 9.

<sup>395</sup>For discussion see Wayland Maxfield Parrish, "The Concept of 'Naturalness'," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXXVII (December, 1951), pp. 448-54.

In the absence of supporting evidence we cannot conclude that the English Reader was the main source for Whitman's conception of public address. Nevertheless, the philosophy expressed in the book appeared in almost all his comments about speakers and speaking. In addition, Whitman's remarks regularly stressed delivery, and his position is illumined by turning to some of them.

He wrote about "the effects and fascinations of Elocution,"<sup>396</sup> of "vocalism limpid, inspired,"<sup>397</sup> and observed:

Of course there is much taught and written about elocution, the best reading, speaking, &c., but it finally settles down to best human vocalization. Beyond all other power and beauty, there is something in the quality and power of the right voice (timbre the schools call it) that touches the soul, the abysses. It was not for nothing that the Greeks depended, at their highest, on poetry's and wisdom's vocal utterance by tete-a-tete lectures--(indeed all the ancients did.)<sup>398</sup>

The statement primarily shows an attraction to voice, but all of delivery was important to Whitman, as is evidenced by his notebook on oratory.

In one of his notes, Whitman pictured an imaginary abolitionist speaker approaching the speaker's platform, "silent, rapid, stern, almost fierce--and delivers an oration of liberty--up-braiding, full of invective--with enthusiasm,"<sup>399</sup> and in another note he recorded a description of speaking style:

After a style of abandon and familiarity among those talked with in rooms, streets, and circle of friends &c., when stepped upon the platform, what a change! Suddenly the countenance illumined the breast expanded the nostrils and mouth electric and quivering the attitude imperious and erect--A God stands before

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<sup>396</sup>WWW, p. 33.

<sup>397</sup>Catel, Rythme et Langage, p. 49.

<sup>398</sup>CW, VII, 21-22.

<sup>399</sup>WWW, p. 74.

you--the sound of the voice also joins in the wonderful transformation--it becomes determined, copious, resistless.<sup>400</sup>

Finkel shows that this description was probably inspired by an essay written about Charles James Fox.<sup>401</sup> He has shown further that many of Whitman's notes on oratory were rough paraphrases or verbatim transcriptions from other sources.<sup>402</sup> That this casts into doubt the conception of Whitman as an original theorist cannot be questioned, but of special significance are his sources. Without intending to do so, Finkel proves that Whitman relied almost exclusively upon sources with a strong elocution bent. To be sure, there were negative comments to the effect that elocution and declamation "have spoiled more speakers than they have benefitted,"<sup>403</sup> and that, "Declamation that has no substratum of substantial mind word is mere literary syllabub, frothy, windy, and in large doses sickening."<sup>404</sup> Nevertheless, such statements were far outweighed by remarks which resemble the following description of the perfect orator:

Within, the memory, the fancy, the judgment, the passions are all busy; without, every muscle, every nerve is exerted; no feature, not a limb, but speaks. The organs of the body attuned to the exertions of the mind, through the kindred organs of the hearers, instantaneously and as it were with an electrical spirit vibrate those energies from soul to soul. Notwithstanding the diversity of minds in such a multitude, by lightning of eloquence, they are melted into one mass, the whole assembly actuate in one and the same way, become as it were but one man, and have but one voice.<sup>405</sup>

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<sup>400</sup>CW, VIII, 251.

<sup>401</sup>Finkel, pp. 50-51.

<sup>402</sup>Ibid., pp. 29-53.

<sup>403</sup>CW, VIII, 258.

<sup>404</sup>Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>405</sup>Ibid., p. 254-55.

The original source for this last note is Thomas Sheridan's Lectures on the Art of Reading and his description of Demosthenes.<sup>406</sup> The description found its way into many of the elocution manuals, and it was from one of these that Whitman made his copy, the "small book" to which Finkel refers, and from which Whitman clipped several pages.<sup>407</sup> These pages contain other passages which glorify delivery.

For Whitman, however, the stress upon delivery was not upon something mechanical, as some of the notes above show. As a basic criterion he echoed Murray in advising that "the passionate and honest heart"<sup>408</sup> lay behind the proper uses of language, and in noting that "the eloquent man is natural."<sup>409</sup> Yet Whitman's "natural man" became transformed into a god whose "lightning of eloquence" vibrated in the audience until "they are melted into one mass," and this master orator was advised:

From the opening of the oration and on through, the great things is to be inspired as one divinely possessed, blind to all subordinate affairs and given up entirely to the surgings and utterances of the mighty tempestuous demon.<sup>410</sup>

To attain Whitman's goals required more than common ability, for he obviously asked for the touch of genius, and in fact his brother, George, testified that Walt only went to hear the speakers "whom he considered geniuses."<sup>411</sup> The reference was to Whitman's admiration for Elias Hicks

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<sup>406</sup>Thomas Sheridan, Lectures on the Art of Reading (London: J. Dodsley, 1781), pp. 311-12.

<sup>407</sup>Finkel, p. 44.

<sup>408</sup>New York Dissected, ed. Emory Holloway and Ralph Adimari (New York: Rufus Rockwell Wilson, 1936), p. 58. Cited below as NYD.

<sup>409</sup>CW, VIII, 258.

<sup>410</sup>Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>411</sup>In Re, p. 38.



and Father Taylor, but he heard and wrote about many other speakers, and his comments fall roughly into the area of rhetorical criticism, the final segment of this background analysis.

Whitman grew up during a time when the influence of rhetorical theory and practice was ubiquitous, and he encountered some of this influence from all sides, but his newspaper work forced him into a direct contact with practical rhetoric. As reporter and editor, he not only had the opportunity to hear speakers; it was his duty to do so, and published collections of his journalism containing many references to speakers and speaking,<sup>412</sup> including mention of revival meetings, political rallies, temperance lectures, lyceum presentations, and commemorative addresses.

Frequently Whitman complained about the quality of the oratory which he heard, comparing the parades and fireworks of the Fourth of July with the "Buncombe Speeches" which were "almost as explosive,"<sup>413</sup> and condemning the "threadbare tediousness of a Fourth of July Oration."<sup>414</sup> He lamented the awkward gestures of a speaker at an abolition meeting and singled out one of the accepted Giants of the Golden Age from some barbed attacks. In spite of Daniel Webster's reputation, Whitman seems never to have recorded a favorable impression of him, for he wrote, "That Webster's private character is miserably bad, is known wherever the man

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<sup>412</sup>I Sit and Look Out, ed. Emory Holloway and Vernolian Schwarz (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932). Cited below as I Sit.  
The Gathering of the Forces, ed. Cleveland Rodgers and John Black (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1920), 2 vol. Cited below as GF. Also see NYD, Aurora, and UPP.

<sup>413</sup>I Sit, p. 59.

<sup>414</sup>NYD, p. 84.

<sup>415</sup>I Sit, p. 87.

is known,"<sup>416</sup> and even more pointedly:

Webster is, and has always been, much overrated. It is the fashion, we know, to speak of his gigantic intellect, and his sledge hammer eloquence; but few who know the man, will give him credit for more than third rate talents. We heard what were considered his best speeches previously to the election in 1840; and, though biassed in favor of his oratorical powers, we could see little more than the mere common place politician.<sup>417</sup>

Yet all was not negative, for during his newspaper days Whitman praised some of the speakers he heard, just as he was to praise Hicks and Taylor in future years, and writing of a certain Captain Wisdom, a temperance lecturer, he said, "His language seemed totally deficient in polish and in grammatical correctness; but he evidently felt what he was saying,"<sup>418</sup> and of the speaker who followed Captain Wisdom:

He was a very uncouth speaker. Yet, how all the boundaries of taste, all the laws of conventional usage, are leaped over, in oratory, by deep feeling and ardent sincerity. Every hearer in the room, assuredly, was thrilled to the heart by portions of this uneducated man's remarks. For our part, we were never more interested in our life.<sup>419</sup>

Once more we can see the pattern taking shape, the pattern in which the speaker's character is of utmost importance, and in which "deep feeling and ardent sincerity" mean everything. The same pattern appears in Whitman's correspondence.

Of particular interest are his letters from Washington, and his many comments about Congressional speaking are interesting in and of themselves, for we have been led to believe that Whitman was so preoccupied with the hospitalized soldiers that he had little time for anything

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<sup>416</sup>OF, II, 183.

<sup>417</sup>Aurora, p. 89.

<sup>418</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>419</sup>Ibid.

else. His correspondence reveals a regular attendance at Congress and in court.<sup>420</sup>

Often he registered complaints because he noted "much gab. . . but no master in congress,"<sup>421</sup> and felt that "the speaking & ability of the members is nearly always on a low scale."<sup>422</sup> But again there were the positive comments. Whitman looked forward eagerly to the opening of each new Congress and often wrote about the excitement to be found in Congressional debates, saying, "The contest between Congress and the President is quite exciting. I go up to the Capitol and listen to the speeches and arguments."<sup>423</sup> He was particularly taken with the night sessions, and in a typical comment wrote, "I was up in Congress very late last night, the house had a very excited night session."<sup>424</sup> He made few specific judgments about individual speakers, preferring to mention the excitement or drabness of the debates, and writing in 1873 he followed in the same vein, saying:

The whole spectacle soon gets to be interesting and even exciting. In fact, the stimulus and magnetism of a whole session are concentrated in the meetings of the last ten days, and especially those at night.<sup>425</sup>

Most of these statements in Whitman's letters were not intended for publication, and a certain lack of precision might have been expected, but he seldom got above the level of rather broad generalizations, most of

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<sup>420</sup>Corres., 37.1, 40, 69, 103, 109, 117, 145, 177, 179, 183, 197.

<sup>421</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>422</sup>Ibid., 117.

<sup>423</sup>Ibid., 179.

<sup>424</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>425</sup>UPP, II, 55.

which are essentially emotionalistic in tenor. Yet they are merely extensions of comments about individual speakers. When group speaking is commended for its "stormy" and "exciting" qualities, or for its "stimulus and magnetism," we are not far removed from the speaker who "apparently felt" what he was saying and who displayed "ardent sincerity." The critic who uses this terminology may have some standards in mind, but they cannot be communicated because they remain vague and subject to individual reaction and interpretation. One man's boredom may be another man's excitement.

Whitman's characteristic vagueness and the attendant emphasis upon the expression of sincere emotion is best demonstrated in his essays about the two preachers Hicks and Taylor. In his youth Whitman had heard the former speak, and in later years wrote of his appearance:

A moment looking around the audience with those piercing eyes, amid the perfect stillness. . . then the words came from his lips. . . in a resonant, grave, melodious voice.<sup>426</sup>

He confessed to having lost the thread of the discourse, and described the impact of the oratory:

A pleading, tender, nearly agonizing conviction, and magnetic stream of natural eloquence, before which all minds and natures, all emotions, high or low, gentle or simple, yielded entirely without exception, was its cause, method and effect. Many, very many were in tears. Years afterward in Boston, I heard Father Taylor, the sailor's preacher, and found in his passionate unstudied oratory the resemblance to Elias Hicks's--not argumentative or intellectual, but so penetrating--so different from anything in the books.<sup>427</sup>

Quite obviously, the emphasis here is upon a natural, unstudied oratory, an oratory which is characterized by a dramatic delivery and by a

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<sup>426</sup>CW, VI, 258.

<sup>427</sup>Ibid., 259.

striking emotional reaction from the audience. These same qualities can be found in Whitman's description of Father Taylor's speaking:

For when Father Taylor preach'd or pray'd, the rhetoric and art, the mere words, (which usually play such a big part,) seem'd altogether to disappear, and the live feeling advanced upon you and seiz'd you with a power before unknown. Everybody felt this marvellous and awful influence.<sup>428</sup>

Both Taylor and Hicks impressed Whitman with "the same inner, apparently inexhaustible, fund of latent volcanic passion,"<sup>429</sup> and he rated their speaking and the "minor but life-eloquence of men like John P. Hale, Cassius Clay, and one or two of the old abolition fanatics," as more impressive than "Webster, Clay, Edward Everett, Phillips, and such celebres."<sup>430</sup> Similarly, Whitman wrote that when Henry Ward Beecher spoke, "You soon feel that a strong man is exercising his powers before you."<sup>431</sup> His criticism of actors and acting is of a kind, and since dramatic criticism was couched in elocution terms, these materials will be included here.

Whitman was exposed to plays in school, and he was forced to attend the theatre as part of his journalistic activity, but as with public address, the habit of attending the theatre went far beyond the call of a newspaper assignment. He wrote many essays about the theatre and acting, and when attempting to describe the influences which had shaped Leaves of Grass, he said:

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<sup>428</sup>CW, VI, 113.

<sup>429</sup>Ibid.

<sup>430</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>431</sup>UPP, I, 235.

Seems to me I ought to acknowledge my debt to actors, singers, public speakers, conventions, and the Stage in New York, my youthful days, from 1835 onward—say to '60 or '61—and to plays and operas generally.<sup>432</sup>

Since in Whitman's time speaking standards in the theatre corresponded with those of the public platform, the interest in acting is further evidence of an attraction to the rhetorical tradition, and this is borne out by his critiques.

He wrote of a performance by Allen Terry, "From first to last it was a continuous stretch of unsurpassed by-play and fine elocution,"<sup>433</sup> and he commended Charles Kean because, "His elocution was good, and his air and bearing such as became royalty."<sup>434</sup> In an adverse review of another performance by Kean, Whitman commented, "His manner, gait, and gestures are unnatural—his almost invariable tone being what may be called a nasal huskiness."<sup>435</sup> There is unusual specificity in the last remark, but it is most atypical of Whitman; more often he would write, "He is a man of bright parts, interesting: you can enjoy him: but he is not a genius of the first class."<sup>436</sup> The sources for such judgments can be discovered through a brief glimpse at his beliefs regarding the theory of acting, for he stated, "The philosophy of acting resides in the feelings and passion—to touch them, wake them, and calm them."<sup>437</sup> He condemned simulated emotion, and paralleling his approach to public speaking, he wrote:

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<sup>432</sup>CW, VII, 49.

<sup>433</sup>UPP, I, 143.

<sup>434</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>435</sup>GF, II, 327.

<sup>436</sup>WWC, I, 485.

<sup>437</sup>WWC, IV, 485.



Though we never acted on the stage, we know well enough, from the analogy of things, that the best way in the world to represent grief, remorse, love, or any given passion, is to feel them at the time, and throw the feeling as far as possible into word and act.<sup>438</sup>

This concludes the sketch of Whitman's primary exposure to the rhetorical tradition, an exposure which began in his early years, took various forms, and lasted throughout his life. The resultant portrait is of a man who was profoundly interested in the rhetorical tradition, but who had little formal education in that tradition. This latter fact probably accounts for part of the emphasis upon elocution. Delivery is the unique aspect of speech, and the novice will almost invariably fasten upon this as being most fascinating. Other factors--the age and such training as he did receive--also pushed Whitman in the direction of elocution standards. Even his interest in the theatre contributed. But there is more in the attraction to elocution than a concern for polished presentation. The remarks about theory and the criticism reveal a man who saw speech as an experience which was potentially an artistic activity, an experience in which the depths of personality could be revealed with dramatic impact. This picture gives a proper background for the discussion of the six criteria, and that discussion will in turn make details of the picture even sharper.

Creator. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the orator in America achieved the status of genius, the status traditionally reserved for the poet, for despite the emphasis upon formal training in the schools, the praise of excellence in oratory granted critical approval to a talent which would break through any system of rules. The theories of Kames and

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<sup>438</sup>cf. II, 322.

Elair may well have encouraged mechanical efforts on the part of both poet and orator, but these same theorists considered the genius to be above the rules, and this blurred the distinction between orator and poet as creator. Whitman drew no real distinction.

A glance at the 1855 Preface is enough to show that he accepted the conception of poet as genius; he championed the role. His long interest in the rhetorical tradition suggests that he assigned an important role to the orator, and he did record approving statements, statements which stressed the importance of communication<sup>439</sup> and which supported open political debating.<sup>440</sup> Writing to John Parker Hale, the Free-soil candidate in 1852, Whitman urged that he take to the public platform because:

Depend upon it, there is no way so good as the face-to-face of candidates and the people—in the old heroic Roman fashion. How little you realize that the souls of the people ever leap and swell to anything like a great liberal thought or principle, uttered by any well-known personage--and how deeply they love the man that promulges such principles with candor and power.<sup>441</sup>

This letter carries the hint of respect for that awesome power that Whitman discerned in the greatest speakers.

There is more than a hint, however, in the Preface to the 1855 edition, for Whitman treated poems, orations, and recitations as parallel endeavors,<sup>442</sup> and there appeared in the poetry:

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<sup>439</sup>CW, VIII, 249-60; Corres., 9.1.

<sup>440</sup>I Sit, p. 96.

<sup>441</sup>Corres., 9.1.

<sup>442</sup>Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass (Brooklyn, New York: 1855), p. v. Cited below as LG. All references to first edition unless otherwise indicated.

My Voice goes after what my eyes cannot reach,  
 With the twirl of my tongue I encompass words and volumes  
 of Worlds.<sup>443</sup>

. . . . A call in the midst of the crowd,  
 My own voice, orotund sweeping and final.<sup>444</sup>

Again the interest in voice enters, and although there is nothing in an attraction for delivery per se which can be equated with a tendency to mark the speaker as a genius, a closer examination of Whitman's attitudes will reveal that his interest in delivery, especially voice, is directly related to his conception of the orator as inspired genius.

In writing about Hicks and Taylor, Whitman considered it a virtue that their discourses were not "argumentative or intellectual," and in these and other criticisms quoted earlier, he emphasized the importance of a delivery which grew out of a "volcanic passion," a natural, unstudied quality which advanced beyond the art of rhetoric in presenting a "live feeling."<sup>445</sup> Other statements in his critiques point up his basic critical posture, for he asked himself:

Talking of oratory, why is it that the unsophisticated practices often strike deeper than the train'd ones? Why do our experiences perhaps of some local county exhorter. . . bring the most definite results? . . . Is not--I sometimes question--the first, last, and most important quality of all, in training for a "finished speaker," generally unsought, unreck'd of, both by teacher and pupil. Though maybe it cannot be taught, anyhow. At any rate, we need clearly understand the distinction between oratory and elocution.<sup>446</sup>

The distinction which was drawn was between elocution, which could be taught, and oratory, which could not. It had to follow that oratory in

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<sup>443</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>444</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>445</sup>Supra, introductory section of Chapter IV.

<sup>446</sup>CW, VI, 113-14.

its true sense was the product of an inspired genius, and this basis of differentiation carried over into Whitman's description of Hicks, where he said:

Then a word about his physical oratory. . . . If there is, as doubtless there is, an unnameable something behind oratory, a fund within or atmosphere without, deeper than art, deeper even than proof. . . a sympathetic germ, probably rapport, lurking in every human eligibility, which no book, no rule, no statement has given or can give inherent, intuition--not even the best speech, or best put forth, but launch'd out only by powerful human magnetism.<sup>447</sup>

In this last observation, Whitman has moved completely away from training, and he has distilled oratory into a kind of mystic expression based upon an intuition that is "deeper than art, deeper even than proof." In the same tenor he wrote:

A great style of reading, or declaiming has the secret sane not theatrical quality of the style of Nature's workmanship. . . it reaches the souls of men by pleasing channels, mysterious penetrations as the light, the air, the beauty, the songs of birds reach the soul, without the soul being conscious of it. At first you find no remarkable attraction about the great masters of orators; but yet there is something too you know not what in the voice, in the easy and calm air.<sup>448</sup>

The mystic and undefinable quality which characterized true oratory for Whitman, and which was primarily a function of delivery, seeped into his poetry, as suggested by his description of his voice, "orotund sweeping and final." This emphasis became much more pronounced later, and in the 1860 edition the Chants Democratic contained "Chant to Oratists" which had sections reading:

1. Vocalism, breath, measure, concentration, determination, and the divine power to use words.
5. O now I see arise orators fit for inland America,

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<sup>447</sup>Ibid., p. 264-65.

<sup>448</sup>Reprinted in Catel, Rythme et Langage, pp. 48-49.

And I see it is as slow to become an orator as to  
become a man,  
And I see that power is folded in a great vocalism.

6. Of a great vocalism, when you hear it, the merciless  
light shall pour, and the storm rage around,  
Every flash shall be a revelation, and insult,  
The glaring flame burned on depths, on heights.<sup>449</sup>

This material was added to other lines to form the poem "Vocalism" in later editions, and some of the additional lines appeared elsewhere in the 1860 edition, with Whitman writing of the voice:

4. Now I believe that all waits for the right voices;  
Where is the practised and perfect organ? Where is  
the developed Soul?  
For I see every word uttered thence has deeper,  
sweeter, new sounds, impossible on less terms.<sup>450</sup>

The factors which account for Whitman's attitudes have already been touched upon in some fashion. The tradition to which he was exposed as the elocution movement held sway was important, as was his more direct exposure through schooling, teaching, and declaiming. Moreover, the conception of the natural genius is more acceptable to the untutored person. These things combined to create Whitman's formulation of the genius orator.

While all of this enables us to say very little about Whitman's poetry at this point, it does permit us to draw some conclusions. Most important is the fact that Whitman found it psychologically acceptable to conceive of himself as an orator. Perhaps it may be a nice question whether he was attracted to oratory because of the status accorded the orator, or whether his notion of the ideal orator is primarily a projection of his

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<sup>449</sup>Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass (Boston: Thayer and Eldridge, 1860), pp. 183-85.

<sup>450</sup>Ibid., p. 240.

own image. The evidence indicates an operation of both factors. We have seen that his attraction to oratory was life-long. At the same time, a career as orator offered tremendous ego satisfaction to Whitman.

His avowed and demonstrated goal was to "get himself on record," and throughout his writings he reflected the lines:

I know perfectly well my own egotism,  
And know my omniverous words, and cannot say any less.<sup>451</sup>

In 1865 he wrote to William D. O'Connor about Leaves of Grass and referred to his satisfaction in having done "what was intended, namely, to express by sharp-cut self-assertion, One's Self."<sup>452</sup> But there were indications that he was not satisfied with the written projection of his personality. He desired the direct confrontation of speaker and audience so that he might truly say:

Behold I do not give lectures or a little charity,  
What I give I give out of myself.<sup>453</sup>

He wanted to communicate as he felt Hicks and Taylor communicated, for he remarked:

Keep steadily understood with respect to the effects and fascinations of Elocution (so broad, spacious, and vital) that although the Lectures may be printed and sold at the end of every performance, nothing can make up for that irresistible attraction and robust living treat of the vocalization of the lecture, by me,--which must defy all competition with the printed and read repetition of the Lectures.<sup>454</sup>

The same concern appeared in Leaves of Grass when Whitman complained:

This is unfinished business with me. . . . how is it with you?

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<sup>451</sup>LG, p. 49.

<sup>452</sup>Corres., 149.

<sup>453</sup>LG, p. 44.

<sup>454</sup>WWW, p. 33.



I was chilled with the cold types and cylinder and wet paper between us.

I pass so poorly with paper and types. . .<sup>455</sup>I must pass with the contact of bodies and souls.

The material in these citations shows Whitman to be unhappy with the indirect communication of the written word. Oratory offered a medium of expression which was in some ways superior because it was more direct and immediate. To some degree then, Whitman's ego undoubtedly fed upon itself in the imagined role of master orator, and it was natural that he hold this role to be the end result of an operative genius. Ironically, Whitman could not attain the ideal which he expressed for the orator because he was physically and temperamentally incapable of the emotional display that he championed. The dynamic impress of personality, the very quality in which oratory surpassed written communication, was beyond Whitman's abilities.<sup>456</sup>

Certainly he was also attracted to a career as poet by the more permanent record which it afforded, and in this career he could avoid the dilemma which faced him as he turned to oratory. He was much taken with the impression made by personality in the act of speech, but this is an ephemeral quality which print can never capture. No lasting record of his personality could be created in this way, and oratory could not be his mode.

This discussion of creator cannot give direct insight into Whitman's poetry, but the consideration of his ideas has been useful. We can better understand his attitudes towards oratory and the reasons why he considered

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<sup>455</sup>LG, p. 57.

<sup>456</sup>Asselineau, Creation of a Personality, p. 96.

the orator to be a genius. At the same time the examination has enabled us to understand his ultimate rejection of oratory as a career. Some of these findings will be further illuminated in the discussion of mode and in the consideration of the criterion which follows immediately, purpose.

Purpose. Traditionally, rhetoric has emphasized persuasion, and poetry has stressed pleasure, but the goals have seldom been mutually exclusive, for there has always been some overlapping in the purposes assigned to speaker and poet. In America during the first half of the nineteenth century, there was an exaggerated blurring of distinctions between rhetoric and poetic on this basis. It is true that the poet remained aloof from controversial matters, but he was expected to uphold the political, social, and economic systems of the country. It is also true that the speaker necessarily engaged in all manner of persuasive speaking, but there was tremendous emphasis upon performance for its own sake. The latter stress is a logical concomitant of the conception of the genius orator, for it follows that true genius is its own excuse for expression.

We have seen that Whitman considered the orator to be a genius, but he made so many varied statements about the purpose of the creative artist that his position has been subjected to a variety of interpretations. However, a satisfactory depiction of his attitudes is possible, and the guiding principle is to be found in his intense desire to express himself. The desire colored most of his statements about the goals of the artist.

Whitman's concern over self-expression has been mentioned earlier, and a further indication of his consuming ego appeared in a notebook jotting which preceded the first edition of Leaves of Grass. He wrote:

I never yet knew how it felt to think I stood in the presence of my superior--If the presence of God were made visible immediately before me, I could not abase myself.--How do I know but I shall myself.<sup>457</sup>

Looking back upon Leaves of Grass from a vantage point of later years, he said:

As my stuff settles into shape, I am told (and sometimes myself discover, uneasily, but feel all right about it in calmer moments) it is mainly autobiographic, and even egotistic after all--which I finally accept, and am contented so.<sup>458</sup>

The interest in self-expression is of the pattern that we saw both shaping and reflecting Whitman's conception of the orator, but he felt there was something beyond the immediate expression of a personality. His most complete statement of the role of the ideal orator comes from a note in which he commented:

True vista before--The strong thought-impression or conviction that the straight, broad, open well-marked true vista before, or course of public teacher, "wander speaker,"--by powerful words, orations, uttered with copiousness and decision, with all the aid of art, also the natural flowing vocal luxuriance of oratory. That the mightiest rule over America could be thus--as for instance, on occasion, at Washington to be, launching from public rooms, at the opening session of Congress--perhaps launching at the President, leading persons, Congressmen, or Judges of the Supreme Court. That to dart hither or thither, as some great emergency might demand--the greatest champion America ever could know, yet holding no office or emolument whatever,--but first in the esteem of men and women. Not to direct eyes or thoughts to any of the usual avenues, as of official appointment, or to get such anyway. To put all those aside for good. But always to keep up living interest in public questions--and always to hold the ear of the people.<sup>459</sup>

The god-like role assigned to the orator was paralleled in his description of the poet's:

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<sup>457</sup>UPP, II, 64.

<sup>458</sup>CW, VII, 31.

<sup>459</sup>CW, IX, 7-8.

Of all nations the United States with veins full of poetical stuff most need poets and will doubtless have the greatest and use them the greatest. Their Presidents shall not be their common referee so much as their poets shall. Of all mankind the great poet is the equable man. Not in him but off from him things are grotesque or eccentric or fail of their sanity. Nothing out of its place is good and in its place is bad. He bestows on every object or quality its fit proportions neither more nor less. He is the arbiter of the diverse and he is the key. He is the equalizer of his age and land. . . . he supplies what wants supplying and checks what wants checking.<sup>460</sup>

Whitman seems to have felt that both poet and orator were to be the prophets of the new life, the men to supply leadership for all mankind. This necessarily implies a persuasive function, but for Whitman it was most indirect, for he said:

The truths I tell you or to any other may not be plain to you, because I do not translate them fully from my idiom into yours.--If I could do so, and do it well, they would be as apparent to you as they are to me; for they are truths.<sup>461</sup>

He remarked that his proposed lectures were to be "full of hints, laws, and informations" to make a superb American intellect and Character in any or all the States.<sup>462</sup> He regularly insisted that there was an incomprehensible essence in oratory and poetry, an intuitively experienced phenomenon which grasped listener or reader. This is the quality which was to shape and lead society, and in a most interesting note, Whitman contemplated:

Write a poem (piec  
the central theme of which shall be  
The Untellable  
That which cannot be put in fine words  
Nor in any words or statement or essay or poem

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<sup>460</sup>LG, p. iv.

<sup>461</sup>UPP, II, 65.

<sup>462</sup>CW, IX, 8.

Of Heroism, or poetry, the life and b  
of both, of Eloquence, of<sup>463</sup>

Somehow a mystic experience in poems, orations, readings, or philosophical disquisitions was to provide man with, "The vitalest pride and truest freedom and practical equality ever known upon the earth."<sup>464</sup> Again we must return to the role of personality, the role so dominant in Whitman's attitude toward the orator.

He wrote that his poetry did not fall into the conventions but was instead "saturated with active human life."<sup>465</sup> It was poetry in which "everything is literally photographed,"<sup>466</sup> for:

Indeed, the qualities which characterize Leaves of Grass are not the qualities of a fine book or poem or any work of art but the qualities of a living and full-blooded man, amativeness, pride, adhesiveness, curiosity, yearning for immortality, joyousness and sometimes of uncertainty. You do not read, it is someone that you see in action, in war, or on a ship, or climbing the mountains, or racing along and shouting aloud in pure exultation."<sup>467</sup>

It is significant that he said, "You do not read, it is someone that you see," because of the attendant stress upon direct communication from poet to reader. Similarly he wrote elsewhere:

The poetry of the future. . . the poetry of the future aims at the free expression of emotion, (which means far, far more than appears at first,) and to arouse and initiate, more than to define or finish. Like all modern tendencies, it has direct or indirect reference continually to the reader, to you or me, to the central identity of everything the mighty Ego.<sup>468</sup>

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<sup>463</sup>Edward G. Bernard, "Some New Whitman Manuscript Notes, "American Literature, VIII (March, 1936), p. 61.

<sup>464</sup>CW, IX, 41.

<sup>465</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>466</sup>Ibid.

<sup>467</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>468</sup>CW, I, 216.



In the same discussion he added that this new poetry was to be different in that the poet was to mark it with his "character, a feature far above style or polish--a feature not absent at any time, but now first brought to the fore," and this character "gives predominant stamp to advancing poetry."<sup>469</sup>

We have come full circle, for the expression of self is seen to be the mark of distinction that Whitman applied to his creative artist--poet or speaker. He did not picture the expression as a simple process however, for the artist and his audience were involved in a most direct and electric communicative act. Characteristically, that communication was vague and indirect because that is in the nature of composition. As James E. Miller argues, the evidence supports the conclusion that Whitman believed that "the true poet has no choice--he writes because he must, because he cannot escape his own furious compulsion."<sup>470</sup> In the introductory essay, we noted that Allen uses a transcendental mystique as the explanation of Whitman's vague statements of purpose, but whatever the causal factors, the orientation was toward the creator and not the audience. Of course Whitman remarked that truths were revealed in art and that the poet was the true prophet of mankind, but expression was all, with direct persuasion but an implied concomitant. But regardless of any vagueness in his conception of purpose, Whitman's remarks about poet and orator indicate remarkably similar goals, and he did not distinguish between the efforts of the two.

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<sup>469</sup>Ibid.

<sup>470</sup>Miller, p. 67.



We are again left at some remove from any direct application to the poetry, but the discussion has served to underline Whitman's receptive attitude toward oratory. Once more there is the problematic consideration, for we cannot be certain whether the primary motivation stemmed from the accepted portrait of the god-like orator or from Whitman's projection of his own image. As in the examination of creator, the evidence indicates the operation of both factors. Nevertheless, we must keep in mind the emphases upon ego and self-expression. Whitman rejected a career in oratory, but his conceptions of the creator and his purpose were, at one level, most fully realized in the public speaking situation. This may not take us into Leaves of Grass, but it at least prepares the way. Not only did the theory and practice of the age dictate that the rhetorical tradition would be reflected in the poetry, but Whitman was disposed to think of himself as an orator, an orator who was not unlike the poet of his dreams. Some results of the age and of his particular orientation can be seen immediately below in the examination of subject.

Subject. It must be granted that neither speaker nor poet faces any inherent limitation upon his choice of subject matter, but there have been periods when artificial restrictions circumscribed the poet's choices. If he did not select from "proper" poetic subjects, he risked critical denunciation. Such a period was the first half of the nineteenth century in America, for accepted theory and practice made it mandatory that certain subjects be avoided. The poet might write for a specific occasion, but such poems became "hymns of the praise of things,"<sup>471</sup> and there were none

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<sup>471</sup>LG, p. v.

of the rhymed political broadsides which typified the era of the Revolution. The poet did not traffic in the world of mundane affairs, and the poetry did not involve the controversial or the contingent. In part this situation was a function of poet's status as genius because that conception carried with it the notion that the poet was aloof from the petty squabbles of everyday life. A stooping to such concerns might well sully the poet's reputation.

Although the orator achieved the status of genius, it is interesting that he was never expected to remove himself from the practical affairs of men. They made up his stock in trade, and necessarily so, for in most controversy and debate, silence is golden only in the opportunity afforded the opposition. One of the very reasons for the popularity of oratory in America at this time was the challenging and almost unlimited vista of topics for discussion and debate. Thus the area of subject was one in which the distinction between orator and poet was maintained, even though there was some superficial dissolution in lines of demarcation.

Whitman's early poetry falls squarely within the prescribed subject areas, but we shall postpone any consideration of that poetry until form is discussed. The delay will introduce no serious problem because the primary focus here is upon the character of the poetry which appeared in the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass, poetry which has always been considered most revolutionary.

The poetry was revolutionary because with the publication of Leaves of Grass, Whitman flew in the face of all conventional restrictions, including the limitations upon subject matter. In his defense of the 1855 edition, he demanded that his poet-prophet be given complete freedom of subject in accomplishing his purpose, and when he said, "The United

States themselves are essentially the greatest poem,"<sup>472</sup> he was not dreaming of an eagle soaring and screaming on high but of an all inclusive entity with "the roughs and beards and space and ruggedness and nonchalance that the soul loves."<sup>473</sup> Such inclusiveness was an absolute necessity for Whitman's poet.

The poet was to be "the arbiter of the diverse. . . the equalizer of his land and age."<sup>474</sup> If in the land peace is the routine, the poet "speaks the spirit of peace," but he can be "the most deadly force of the war," and "If the time becomes slothful and heavy he knows how to arouse it."<sup>475</sup> In guiding the nation, "His spirit responds to his country's spirit. . . . he incarnates its geography and natural life and rivers and lakes."<sup>476</sup> Tallying all the geographical features, spanning the distance between the oceans, the poet was to observe all, respond to all, and record all, including:

. . . . the free commerce--the fisheries and whaling and gold-digging--the endless gestation of new states--the convening of Congress every December, the members duly coming up from all climates and the uttermost parts. . . . the noble character of the young mechanics and of all free American workmen and work-women.<sup>477</sup>

If these remarks suggest that the flag was being unfurled, the notion is quelled soon enough because Whitman argued that there was nothing which should lie beyond the ken of the true poet. "Nothing can jar him."<sup>478</sup>

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<sup>472</sup>Ibid., p. iii.

<sup>473</sup>Ibid.

<sup>474</sup>Ibid., p. iv.

<sup>475</sup>Ibid.

<sup>476</sup>Ibid.

<sup>477</sup>Ibid.

<sup>478</sup>Ibid., p. x.

He was to know all and exclude nothing:

Not one name of word or deed. . not of venereal sores or discolorations. . not the privacy of the onanist. . not the putrid veins of gluttons or rumdrinkers. . . not speculation or cunning or betrayal or murder. . no serpentine poison of those that seduce women. . not the foolish yielding of women... . not prostitution. . not of any depravity of young men.<sup>479</sup>

These statements are from the Preface, but in an earlier editorial Whitman had openly discussed vice, complaining that prostitution presented an urgent problem, "Though of course not acknowledged or talked about, or even alluded to in "respectable Society."<sup>480</sup> Later he complained:

I want the utmost freedom--even the utmost license--rather than any censorship: censorship is always ignorant, always bad: whether the censor is a man of virtue or a hypocrite seems to make no difference: the evil is always evil. Under any responsible social order decency will always take care of itself.<sup>481</sup>

Explaining his approach to poetry, Whitman said that he had taken no theme "generally considered as the stock fit for or motif for poetry," and added:

In these Leaves everything is literally photographed. Nothing is poetized, no divergence, not a step, not an inch, nothing for beauty's sake, no euphemism, no rhyme.<sup>482</sup>

In anonymous reviews of the 1855 edition, he maintained the same position, writing of himself, "He appears in his poems surrounded by . . . common objects and qualities. He gives to each just what belongs to it, neither more nor less,"<sup>483</sup> and rejecting the stock approach in which:

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<sup>479</sup>Ibid.

<sup>480</sup>UPP, II, 6.

<sup>481</sup>WWC, I, 173-74.

<sup>482</sup>CW, IX, 20-21.

<sup>483</sup>In Re, p. 15.

Other poets celebrate great events, personages, romances, wars, loves, passions, the victories and power of their country, or some real or imagined incident--polish their word and come to some conclusions, and satisfy the reader.<sup>484</sup>

In his poetry Whitman carried out his theory, for in spite of any inaccuracy in the lines, he did write:

Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos  
Disorderly fleshy and sensual. . . . eating drinking and  
breeding,  
No sentimentalist. . . . no stander above men and women  
or apart from them. . . . no more modest than immodest.<sup>485</sup>

His frankness about sex is a commonplace topic, but he was merely carrying out his goal when he wrote of "loveroot, silk-thread, crotch and vine,"<sup>486</sup> or of the young men who were observed swimming by a young woman, "They do not know who puffs and declines with pendant and bending arch,"<sup>487</sup> or:

Mad filaments, ungovernable shoots play out of it.. the  
response likewise ungovernable,  
Hair, bosom, hips, bend of legs, negligent falling hands--  
all diffused. . . . mine too diffused,  
Ebb stung by the flow, and flow stung by the ebb. . . .  
lovesflesh swelling and deliciously aching,  
Limitless limpid jets of love hot and enormous. . . .  
quivering jelly of love. . . whiteblow and delirious  
juice,  
Bridegroom-night of love working surely and softly into  
the prostrate dawn,  
Undulating into the willing and yielding day,  
Lost in the cleave of the clasping and sweetfleshed day.<sup>488</sup>

These lines together with those such as, "Do you fear some scrofula out of the unflagging pregnancy"<sup>489</sup> caused a furor which is readily understood.

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<sup>484</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>485</sup>Id., p. 29.

<sup>486</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>487</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>488</sup>Ibid., pp. 78-79.

<sup>489</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

Even in a day when the people of the United States can read Joyce's Ulysses and the unexpurgated Lady Chatterly's Lover, and when the utmost in sophistication is at least pretended, many readers can be shocked by the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass. How much more shocking it must have been in a society that at least pretended to more modesty and gentility. The mention of sex was the focal point for critical denunciation, but if Whitman had eliminated such lines the attacks would have merely shifted to other places where he defied the restrictions upon the choice of subject, to lines of this tally:

The jour printer with gray head and gaunt jaws works at  
his ease,  
He turns his quid of tobacco, his eyes get blurred with  
the manuscript;  
The malformed limbs are tied to the anatomist's table,  
What is removed drops horribly in a pail;  
The quadroon girl is sold at the stand. . . . the drunkard  
nods by the barroom stove,  
The machinist rolls up his sleeves. . . . the policeman  
travels his beat.<sup>490</sup>

Or the objections might have centered upon:

The wretched features of ennuyees, the white features of  
corpses, the livid faces of drunkards, the sick-  
gray faces of onanists,  
The gashed bodies on battlefields, the insane in their  
strong-doored rooms, the sacred idiots.<sup>491</sup>

In these subjects Whitman was almost as offensive to the critical standards as in his references to sex and anatomy, and in choosing to ignore those dicta he took a position which characterizes the rhetorical approach to subject. It is as simple as this: In free societies, all subjects fall within the purview of the orator; in these same societies there have been limited "proper" subjects for the poet. Whitman would not accept the

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<sup>490</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>491</sup>Ibid., p. 70.



limitations. He could not if his poet was to play the prophetic leader of the people.

In a day when any subject is a proper subject for poetry, we may forget that the prohibitions in this regard were most compelling. We may remember Whitman's use of free verse and relegate his disregard for conventional subjects--if we think of it at all--to a subordinate position, forgetting that it was a most revolutionary shift. To do so is to err as the present-day Conservative errs when he rejects political change on the authority of revolutionists whom he calls "The Founding Fathers." By clamoring for freedom of a different sort, Whitman was a most important force in creating the situation which the poet finds today, but the situation has not always existed, and the basic change was a move in the direction of a rhetorical orientation. This did not make rhetoricians of all poets, but it is a factor which is appropriate to the present discussion. It reveals an aspect of Whitman's rhetorical orientation. The ultimate purposes of his poet were mystic and vague, and they were achieved through indirection, but at the foundation there was the reaction and expression of the personality. That personality had to be unfettered, consequently, it demanded a free choice of subject, just as it demanded a rejection of conventional structural patterns.

Form. Just as modern poetry has seen the rejection of the conventional limitations upon subject, so it has also witnessed the rejection of many formal conventions. Furthermore many theorists have insisted that the formal distinction between rhetoric and poetic was superficial, but the fact remains that the prose-verse differentiation has been a regular method employed in distinguishing between rhetoric and poetic, and it formed an important critical element in American letters during the first half of the nineteenth century.

In his early poetry, Whitman chose accepted subjects, and he wrote about them in the stock patterns of verse and diction. As Thomas L. Brasher says:

The kindest remark that one can make about Whitman's early verse is that it was conventional: it was the sort of thing being printed each year by the hundreds in newspapers, magazines, and gift books.<sup>492</sup>

The accuracy of his observation is demonstrated when we turn to any of the early poetry, for example "Young Grimes," in which Whitman considered virtue rewarded and wrote the following stanzas:

Upon a hill, just off the road  
That winds the village side,  
His farm house stands, within whose door  
Ne'er entered Hate or Pride.

But Plenty and Benevolence  
And Happiness are there—  
And underneath that lowly roof  
Content smiles calm and fair.

Reader, go view the cheerful scene—  
By it how poor must prove  
The pomp, and tinsel, and parade  
Which pleasure's followers love.<sup>493</sup>

In "The Inca's Daughter," published in 1840, there was no personification, no door where "Ne'er entered Hate or Pride," but the daughter orated dramatically:

Her snake-like eye, her cheek of fire,  
Glowed with intenser, deeper hue;  
She smiled in scorn, and from her robe  
A poisoned arrow drew.

"Now, paleface see! the Indian girl  
Can teach thee how to bravely die;  
Hail! spirits of my kindred slain,  
A sister ghost is nigh!"<sup>494</sup>

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<sup>492</sup>Walt Whitman, *The Early Poems and the Fiction*, ed. Thomas L. Brasher (New York: New York University Press, 1963), p. xv.

<sup>493</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>494</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

The words and structure of the stanzas above are most conventional, and they are typical of almost everything that Whitman published before 1855. In 1846 he composed a patriotic Fourth of July ode to be sung to the tune of "The Star Spangled Banner," and in the same year he registered a complaint against the departure from accepted stylistic norms. Reviewing Carlyle's Heroes and Hero Worship, Whitman remarked:

We must confess, however, that we would have preferred to get the thoughts of this truly good thinker, in a plainer and more customary garb. No great writer achieves anything worthy of him, by merely inventing a new style. Style in writing, is much as dress in society; sensible people will conform to the prevalent mode, and it is not of infinite importance anyhow, and can always be so varied, as to fit one's peculiar way, convenience, or circumstance.<sup>495</sup>

However, Whitman was soon to consider ways in which he might vary style in order to make it fit his own "peculiar way," for he shortly began to assemble notes which were to lead into the style of 1855. Moreover, he published some of this more experimental work in 1850. There was still an adherence to some of the regular expressions, but there was a movement toward the freer structure, as is evidenced in lines from "Resurgemus:"

Mark you now:  
Not for numberless agonies, murders, lusts,  
For court thieving in its manifold mean forms,  
Worming from his simplicity the poor man's wages;  
For many a promise sworn by royal lips  
And broken, and laughed at in the breaking.<sup>496</sup>

Whitman was extremely self-conscious about his departure from formal standards, and his writings reflect both an honest concern for the function

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<sup>495</sup>UPP, I, 191; GF, II, 291.

<sup>496</sup>Brasher, p. 38.

of form and an eagerness to defend. He suggested that the development of metre and rhyme grew out of the oral tradition, assisting the memory and providing pleasure for the barbaric ear.<sup>497</sup> He felt that the invention of printing had made such techniques unnecessary, and he became adamant in maintaining that they were not needed in poetry, saying, "many trouble themselves about conforming to laws. A great poet is followed by laws--- they conform to him."<sup>498</sup> In reviews of his own poetry he wrote, "Undecked also is this poet with sentimentalism, or jingle, or nice conceits, or flowery similes,"<sup>499</sup> and:

Every word that falls from his mouth shows silent disdain and defiance of the old theories and forms. Every phrase announces new laws; not once do his lips unclothe except in conformity with them. With light and rapier touch he first indicates in prose the principles of the foundation of a race of poets.<sup>500</sup>

The reference was to the prose in the Preface, and Whitman wrote there, "who troubles himself about his ornaments or fluency is lost,"<sup>501</sup> and:

The poetic quality is not marshalled rhyme or uniformity or abstract addresses to things nor in melancholy complaints or good precepts, but in the life of these and much else and is in the soul.<sup>502</sup>

Similar statements can be found throughout his writings,<sup>503</sup> but he did not reject conventional standards out of hand, for he spoke of the pleasant effect achieved in the best patterns of verse, and he always accorded a

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<sup>497</sup>CW, IX, 36.

<sup>498</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>499</sup>In Re, p. 15.

<sup>500</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>501</sup>LG, p. v.

<sup>502</sup>Ibid.

<sup>503</sup>CW, V, 205-29; NYD, pp 55-6, 211.

highest rank to the poetry of Bryant and Longfellow.<sup>504</sup> But Whitman's ideal poet was to do more than to grant passing entertainment or preach of moral virtues, and his style was a necessary development of Whitman's ideas relating to creator, purpose, and subject. The true genius who was to tally America, and whose mighty presence was to lead America, must have complete freedom of topic and expression. There is real significance to be attached to Brasher's observation, "In 1850 Whitman abandoned subjectively sentimental themes and turned to political issues. At the same time he turned to less conventionally regular metrics."<sup>505</sup>

Whitman himself testified to the point when he wrote to the editors of Harpers:

You may start at the style. Yes, it is a new style, of course, that is necessitated by new theories, new themes—or say the new treatment of themes, forced upon us for American purposes. Every really new person, (poet or other,) makes his style—sometimes a little way removed from the previous models sometimes very far removed.<sup>506</sup>

The pattern of language use was to be the natural response of the poet to his subject, for, "To use language properly is a rare art; the passionate and honest heart, perfect knowledge, and native idioms underlie this art."<sup>507</sup> In another statement, Whitman wrote, "Sincere writing comes of clear and strong conviction, comes of love and hate, is colloquial, irregular, unlike the writing of any one else, imprudent audacious."<sup>508</sup> This advice repeats that given the speaker when he was advised to rely

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<sup>504</sup>CW, V, 8-9, 30-33.

<sup>505</sup>Brasher, p. xvi.

<sup>506</sup>Corres., 14.

<sup>507</sup>NYD, p. 58.

<sup>508</sup>Ibid., p. 211, n. 22.

on the "natural eloquence" which came from "deep feeling" and "sincerity." Significantly, Whitman believed that the spontaneous character of the oratorical style was of a superior nature, and he said of the editorial writer:

He should have a fluent style: elaborate finish we do not think requisite in daily writing. His articles had far better be earnest and terse than polished; they should ever smack of being uttered on the spur of the moment, like political oratory.<sup>509</sup>

We know, of course, that the various editions of Leaves of Grass and the notebooks present a case study in revision which is unique, but many of his revisions do not "smack" of the polishing, although it is more obvious in some later work. But for the most part, Whitman moved away from the stock patterns into the area of free verse, into an area much closer to prose than to verse. This is demonstrated on every page of the 1855 edition. In the following samples, the punctuation has been altered slightly in order to emphasize the characteristic style, but there have been no other changes of any kind.

I hear the sound of the human voice, a sound I love.  
I hear all the sounds as they are tuned to their uses, sounds of the city and sounds out of the city, sounds of the day and night.<sup>510</sup>

What is there ready and near you now? You may read in many languages and read nothing about it; you may read the President's message and read nothing about it there, nothing in the reports from the state department or treasury department, or in the daily papers, or the weekly papers, or in the census returns or assessors' returns, or prices current, or any accounts of stock.<sup>511</sup>

Another interesting example follows, and immediately after it appears another sample of writing from Whitman's time.

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<sup>509</sup>UPP, I, 115.

<sup>510</sup>LG, p. 31.

<sup>511</sup>Ibid., p. 59.



Will the Whole come back then?  
 Can each see the signs of the best by a look in the  
 looking-glass? Is there nothing greater or more?  
 Does all sit there with you and here with me?

The old forever new things. . . . you foolish child. . . .  
 the closest simplest things--this moment with you,  
 Your person and every particle that relates to your person,  
 The pulses of your brain waiting their chance and encour-  
 agement at every deed or sight:  
 Anything you do in public by day, and anything you do in  
 secret weekdays,  
 What is called right and what is called wrong.<sup>512</sup>

I embrace the common,  
 I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low.

Give me insight into today, and you may have the antique  
 and future worlds.

What would we really know the meaning of? . . . the meal  
 in the firkin. . . the milk in the pan. . . the  
 ballad in the street. . . the news of the boat. . .

The glance of the eye the form and gate of the body.  
 Show me the ultimate reason of these matters,  
 Show me the sublime presence of the highest spiritual  
 cause lurking

As always it does lurk in these suburbs and extremities  
 of nature.

Let me see every trifle bristling with the polarity that  
 ranges on an eternal law.

And the shop the plough and the ledger referred to the like  
 cause by which the light undulates and poets sing.<sup>513</sup>

The second example above is from Emerson's "The American Scholar," and the only changes were made in punctuation and arrangement on the page; there were no changes in the text. Since Emerson was a poet, and since his speeches differed from much of the oratory, the comparison might be considered unfair, but this in no way changes the fact that Whitman moved sharply in the direction of a prose style. Much remains to be done by way of investigations into the nature of prose rhythms and of rhythmic patterns employed by speakers, but it is obvious that Whitman discarded

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<sup>512</sup>Ibid., pp. 60-61.

<sup>513</sup>Emerson, p. 281.

most of the "flowery similes" and other studied uses of language, reflecting his advice for composition:

Rules for Composition--A perfectly transparent, plate-glassy style, artless, with no ornaments, or attempts at ornaments, for their own sake--they only looking well when like the beauties of the person or character by nature and intuition, and never lugged in to show off, which nullifies the best of them, no matter when and where.<sup>514</sup>

The best style was to "show itself in new combinations and new meanings" and "be carefully purged of anything striking or dazzling or ornamental."<sup>515</sup> Whitman found his desire in a style akin to that of the orator, and in truth he went beyond the typical orator in his search for a plainer style of expression.

It would be too much to conclude that Whitman made his choice solely because of his interest in the rhetorical tradition. Nevertheless, his intense desire to establish a contact with the audience and an impression of personality which approximated those effected in the public speaking situation unquestionably operated in his having chosen a more natural style, a style less embellished. Similarly, a style more like prose was naturally associated with freer range of subject matter. This does not permit us to consider Whitman a rhetorician, but his poetry moved in form in the direction of the rhetorical tradition, and some of the factors which encouraged that move came from that same tradition and his attraction to it.

Authorial Presence. In the earlier discussions, the basis of relationships between rhetoric and poetic in the area of this criterion

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<sup>514</sup>CW, IX, 34-35.

<sup>515</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

has been established by considering the lines of communication between the creator and his audience. Generally speaking, rhetorical utterance is approached by a telling, a communication moving in the direction of the first person point of view; conversely, poetic utterance is approached by a showing, a communication moving away from the first-person point of view and becoming more indirect in relating the creator and the audience. In the examination of poetry from the first half of the nineteenth century, it was pointed out that American poets produced efforts marked by rhetorical emphasis in this respect. The presence of the author obviously intruded, and it intruded in Whitman's early poetry, for he wrote in a fashion typical of the period.

With the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass, Whitman took the rhetorical tendency in poetry to its extreme. His poetry does not move toward the first person point of view; it is there. The first lines read:

I celebrate myself,  
And What I assume you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

I loaf and invite my soul,  
I lean and loafe at my ease. . . . observing a spear  
of summer grass.<sup>516</sup>

This establishes the fundamental characteristic of the poetry, a characteristic evident throughout Leaves of Grass because the "I" of the author addresses the "you" of the audience most directly:

Do you guess I have some intricate purpose?  
Well I have. . . . for the April rain has, and the mica  
on the side of a rock has.

Do you take it I would astonish?  
Does the daylight astonish? or the early redstart twit-  
tering through the woods?  
Do I astonish more than they?

This hour I tell things in confidence,  
I might not tell everybody but I will tell you.

Who goes there! hankering, gross, mystical, nude?  
How is it I extract strength from the beef I eat?

What is a man anyhow? What am I? and what are you?  
All I mark as my own you shall offset it with your own.  
Else it were time lost listening to me.<sup>517</sup>

Both passages above illustrate the first person point of view well, and they are typical. The latter also serves to demonstrate the use of rhetorical question, a technique employed regularly in Leaves of Grass, some of the best remembered lines utilizing that device:

A child said, What is the grass? fetching it to me with  
full hands;  
How could I answer the child? . . . I do not know what  
it is any more than he.<sup>518</sup>

Have you reckoned a thousand acres much? Have you  
reckoned the earth much?  
Have you practiced so long to learn to read?  
Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?<sup>519</sup>

The lines with the child might be considered prosopopoeia, but Whitman did not see fit to use this device with any regularity. It did appear in Leaves of Grass, but the instances were isolated, and it is perhaps significant that prosopopoeia is an artificially created scene. As noted earlier, this technique is indirect, and it does not serve to tighten the bonds in the audience-creator situation as much as the rhetorical question can. The other devices from the rhetorical tradition--exclamation and the related development of apostrophe--appeared directly and by implication in the 1855 edition.

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<sup>517</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>518</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>519</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

There were lines, "O hope and faith! O aching close of Lives!  
O many a sickened heart!"<sup>520</sup> and "Hurrah for positive science! Long  
live exact demonstration!"<sup>521</sup> Even more numerous than the exclamatory  
phrases ending in the conventional punctuation were the many intense  
expressions which terminated with a series of periods, as in the descrip-  
tion of a sea fight where Whitman wrote:

Along the lowered eve he came, horribly raking us.  
We closed with him. . . . the yards entangled. . . . the  
cannon touched,  
My captain lashed fast with his own hands.<sup>522</sup>

The emotional impact of the lines would normally require that the  
exclamation point be used.

The easy shift from exclamation through personification to apostrophe  
occurred in Leaves of Grass, and when Whitman addressed the night, he said:

Press close barebosomed night! Press close magnetic  
nourishing night!  
Night of south winds! Night of the large few stars!  
Still nodding night! Mad naked summer night!

Smile O voluptuous coolbreathed earth!  
Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!<sup>523</sup>

In the same fashion, Whitman addressed the sea, writing:

Sea of stretched ground-swells!  
Sea of breathing broad and convulsive breaths!  
Sea of the brine of life! Sea of unshovelled and  
always ready graves!  
Howler and scooper of storms!<sup>524</sup>

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<sup>520</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>521</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>522</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>523</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>524</sup>Ibid.

There were, however, few such examples in the 1855 edition because Whitman did not rely upon such structures in his effort to achieve directness; instead he attempted to establish a straightforward communicative act through expressions indicating the first person point of view and through verbal constructs which appear to indicate action taking place here and now. This is true even of the catalogues. The lists may seem endless at times, but there was never any circumlocution or embellishment. The same can be said of Whitman's soliloquies, for they were often interrupted with lines directed to the audience in a forthright fashion, lines such as, "You should have been with us that day around the chowder-kettle,"<sup>525</sup> or:

Did you read in the seabooks of the oldfashioned frigate-  
fight?

Did you learn who won by the light of the moon and stars?<sup>526</sup>

By inserting these lines, Whitman made the audience aware of the presence of the writer, and he established a rhetorical orientation in his poetry.

It is worth noting that in later editions Whitman turned more and more to the conventional apostrophe and exclamation, replete with the appropriate typography. For example, the "Proto-leaf" section of the 1860 edition is filled with these devices, and the introductory poem in the "Chants Democratic" is sub-titled "Apostrophe" and begins:

O mater! O fils!  
O brood continental!  
O flowers of the prairies!  
O space boundless! O hum of mighty products!<sup>527</sup>

This is just a fragment, but the point is made, and this later tendency unquestionably has led scholars to conclude:

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<sup>525</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>526</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>527</sup>LG, 1860, p. 105.



An examination of some of the passages will disclose at once that in some of them the repetition is rhetorical, like that of the orator, who to emphasize a point pounds the rostrum and shouts his phrase over and over again.<sup>528</sup>

The impression is not created so much by repetition as by the general exclamatory posture. The reaction takes place in response to the over-indulgence in the stock devices. That is why they are so "stock."

Asselineau shows that this conventional trend included the appearance of regular patterns of form and the use of poetic terms in later editions of Leaves of Grass.<sup>529</sup> This matter lies outside the purposes of the present study, and it has been brought up here merely to indicate the nature of some critical reaction and to re-enforce the contention that there have been some rather sweeping generalizations as to the nature of the oratorical quality in Leaves of Grass.

In the 1855 edition, at least, Whitman did not make extensive use of the conventions from the rhetorical tradition in the attempt to achieve a direct contact with his audience. Nevertheless, the presence of the author dominated the poetry because of the first person posture, and this is yet another indication of rhetorical stress within Leaves of Grass.

The obvious intrusion of authorial presence was a most natural development. Already an incipient tendency within the poetic tradition, it provided an orientation that would enable Whitman's creator to achieve his purpose. There may have been an indirection in some of the lines, but that was in meaning. An essential part of "the new treatment of themes" was the manner of presentation, and in that aspect of the

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<sup>528</sup>Robert D. Faner, Walt Whitman and Opera (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1951), p. 207.

<sup>529</sup>Asselineau, The Creation of a Book.

poetry there was little indirection. There could not be if the creator was to create an immediate and forceful impact of his personality, and that goal demanded the mode of the orator, a mode that Whitman knew and cherished.

Mode. The impact of personality, ethos, has always been an important factor in rhetoric, and the nature of ethical proof can be approached in two ways, external ethos residing in the impression of character which exists outside the communicative act and internal ethos residing in the impression created by the act itself. Traditionally associated with rhetorical criticism, it is impossible to have a complete poetic without giving some recognition to this factor, and in the period which we are examining, ethical proof was a matter of considerable import for the literary critic. He addressed himself to the moral quality of the poetry and the morals of the poet's private and public life. Again there was a blurring of distinctions between rhetoric and poetic, and Whitman supported this type of judgment when he wrote, "Who wants a glorification of courage and manly defiance from a coward or a sneak?--a ballad of benevolence or chastity from some rhyming hunks, or lascivious, glib rouse?"<sup>530</sup> That he felt such evaluation to be valid is evidenced in the number of ways in which he attempted to create a favorable image in the mind of the public. Many of his attempts were implemented outside the poetry, and we shall consider aspects of external ethos first.

Critics are fond of discussing Whitman's "masks" and "poses," Richard Chase saying, "He was an inveterate poseur,"<sup>531</sup> and Allen

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<sup>530</sup>UPP, II, 56.

<sup>531</sup>Chase, p. 6.

remarking, "He. . . actually exploited his personality in a relentless, indiscriminate, and sometimes almost unscrupulous manner."<sup>532</sup> Walt Whitman's Pose, the study by Esther Shephard, is in large part an analysis of the various images which Whitman projected, and whatever label may be used, he lived as several different people during his life, at least insofar as the outward appearances. We find him as a lazy, indolent youth, later as something of a foppish dandy, still later as the rough and bearded commoner, and finally as the Good Gray Poet.<sup>533</sup> Although we cannot construct a comprehensive view of Whitman's interest in attire and physical appearance, this was a matter of utmost concern to him. His attitude has been suggested earlier in the comments about speakers, and his writings are filled with remarks about his reactions to facial characteristics and clothing.<sup>534</sup> In his letters he included regular observations about the effect of his appearance, and pleased with the impression created by his boots, his ruddy complexion, and his beard, he concluded, "Then around my majestic brow, around my well-brimmed felt hat--black & gold cord with acorns. Altogether the effect is satisfactory."<sup>535</sup> He wrote in another letter that he looked "strong, ugly, and nonchalant, with my white beard--people stare, I notice, more wonderingly than ever,"<sup>536</sup> and Whitman strove to gain acceptance on the basis of the character projected by his physical appearance.

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<sup>532</sup>Allen, Man, Poet, and Legend, pp. 44-45.

<sup>533</sup>See Miller, Walt Whitman, for excellent brief discussion of Whitman's varied poses. More extended treatment in Esther Shephard, Walt Whitman's Pose (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1936).

<sup>534</sup>Corres., 13. 18, 40.

<sup>535</sup>Corres., 84.

<sup>536</sup>Ibid., 13.

In addition to putting on the robes of the bearded and somewhat disorderly rough, Whitman painted a similar picture of himself in the anonymous reviews of the 1855 edition. The very act of writing such reviews can be taken as strong evidence of his dedication to the creation of a satisfactory impression of personality, and in one of these statements he wrote:

An American bard at last! One of the roughs, large, proud, affectionate, eating, drinking, and breeding, his costume manly and free, his face sunburnt and bearded, his posture strong and erect, his voice bringing hope and prophecy to the generous races of young and old.<sup>537</sup>

This was an obvious attempt to relate appearance to character, and that character was just as obviously to be a strong, vigorous, independent, and democratic personality. In the same review, Whitman went on to support the new approach to subject and form which this man of the people demanded. After rejecting the "sentimentalism, jingle, and flowery similes" of conventional poetry, he presented what seemed to be a frank and open description of a proud and honest man:

Self-reliant, with haughty eyes, assuming to himself all the attributes of his country, steps Walt Whitman into literature, talking like a man unaware that there was ever hitherto such a production as a book, or such a being as a writer. Every move of him has the free ply of the muscle of one who never knew what it was to feel that he stood in the presence of a superior. Every word that falls from his mouth shows silent disdain and defiance of the old theories and forms.<sup>538</sup>

But this picture of the master poet did not end with the descriptions of his appearance and abilities as a man of letters, for he went far beyond petty scribbling:

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<sup>537</sup>In Re, p. 13.

<sup>538</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

In politics he could enter with the freedom and reality he shows in poetry. His scope of life is the amplest of any yet in philosophy. He is the true spiritualist. He recognizes no annihilation, or death, or loss of identity. He is the largest lover and sympathizer that has appeared in literature.<sup>539</sup>

Yet Whitman did not want to give the impression of a too proud man, and he injected the proper touch of modesty, writing, "Walt Whitman himself disclaims singularity in his work, and announces the coming after him of great successions of poets,"<sup>540</sup> and in another review the man of the people came into view:

O pure American breed, large and lusty--age thirty-six years, (1855)--never once using medicine--never dressed in black, always dressed freely and clean in strong clothes--neck open, shirt collar flat and broad, countenance tawny transparent red, beard well-mottled with white, hair like hay after it has been mowed in the field and lies tossed and streaked--his physiology corroborating a rugged phrenology--a person singularly beloved and looked toward, especially by young men and the illiterate--one who has firm attachments there, and associates there--one who does not associate with literary people--a man never called upon to make speeches at public dinners--never on platforms amid the crowds of clergymen, or professors, or aldermen, or congressmen--rather down at the bay with pilots in their pilot-boat.<sup>541</sup>

This true democrat was, "A rude child of the people! No imitation--No foreigner--but a growth and idiom of America,"<sup>542</sup> for he:

Loves the streets--loves the docks--loves the free rasping talk of men--likes to be called by his given name, and nobody at all need Mr. him--can laugh with laughers--likes the ungenteel ways of laborers--is not prejudiced one mite against the Irish--talks readily with them--talks readily with niggers.<sup>543</sup>

These quotations leave no doubt as to the impression Whitman was

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<sup>539</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>540</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>541</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>542</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>543</sup>Ibid., p. 16.



trying to create, and that he was asking for acceptance of his poetry on the basis of his personality, not necessarily on the basis of the poetry itself. He even went to the point of discussing his egotism, frankly thrusting it upon the reader. The remarks are the more interesting for the additional insight into Whitman's ideas concern the role of personality in poetry:

What good is it to argue about egotism? There can be no two thoughts on Walt Whitman's egotism. That is avowedly what he steps out of the crowd and turns and faces them for. Mark, critics! Otherwise is not used for you the key that leads to the use of the other keys to this well-enveloped man. His whole work, his life, manners, friendships, writings, all have among their leading purposes and evident purpose to stamp a new type of character, namely his own, and intelibly fix it and publish it, not for a model but an illustration, for the present and future of American letters.<sup>544</sup>

In later years Whitman altered the portrayal of himself, making it fit more closely with the image of the Good Gray Poet. In a description that he wanted to be used in the English editions he wrote, "Personally the author of Leaves of Grass is in no sense or sort whatever the "rough," the "eccentric," "vagabond" or queer person, that the commentators. . . persist in making him."<sup>545</sup> He went on to describe himself as a cheerful, attractive, and rather conservative person, one to whom even the most refined persons were attracted, for, "The most delicate & even conventional lady only needs to know him to love him."<sup>546</sup> The re-painting of the portrait followed the more conventional turning in the later editions of Leaves of Grass, but as mentioned earlier, that development lies outside the province of the present investigation.

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<sup>544</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>545</sup>Corres., 256.

<sup>546</sup>Ibid.



Similarly, any analysis of Whitman's masks or poses as a problem in chicanery and deceit is not our concern, for whatever moral judgment we may wish to attach, the fact remains that he quite simply and deliberately set out to create a favorable impression of his personality. This was done in order to gain acceptance for himself and his poetry, and that is all we need to know for the present purposes. Whitman's concentrated effort in the area of external ethos has been demonstrated, and attendant rhetorical stress has been also. No matter how artificial the image, no matter how proper the techniques utilized, the orientation was fundamentally that associated with the orator.

The same orientation was carried forward throughout Leaves of Grass. The enthusiastic assertions about the nature of the poet and poetry which constitute the argument of the Preface were not merely descriptions. They championed the poetry which was to follow, and they committed the poet to a particular approach. The themes and forms which were to constitute that approach were also presented in argumentative fashion to gain a favorable hearing from the audience. There were appeals to pride in the rising nationalistic spirit and appeals to the common man, and these appeals were always tied to the picture of the new poet, for he was to reflect all such characteristics himself. The land of the roughs and the beards demanded a man of the people, a true prophet full of pride, but:

The great poets are also to be known by the absence in them of tricks and by the justification of perfect personal candor. Then folks echo a new cheap joy and a divine voice leaping from their brains: How beautiful is candor! All faults may be forgiven of him who has perfect candor.<sup>547</sup>

Here perfect humility and frankness were brought to bear as appeals for the personality because while the great poet might err, his confession should lead to divine forgiveness. In the same vein, Whitman had noted about speaking:

In "Lessons" (Orations) the new speaker need not (must not) spare himself

"I have sinned" must run through some part of them, or may run through--Confession, Penance, an open exposition--

? Why not mention myself by name, Walt Wh - - -, in my speeches--aboriginal fashion?<sup>548</sup>

These jottings underline the Whitman attachment to the expression of personality and the need he felt to appeal through the impact of character. The notion of the confession constituted an appeal which was directly related to the proper humility, and Whitman carried the latter out when he argued in the Preface:

America does not repel the past or what it has produced under its forms or amid other politics or the idea of castes or the old religions. . . . accepts the less with calmness . . . is not so impatient as has been supposed that the slough still sticks to opinions and manners and literature while the life which served its requirements has passed into the new life of the new forms. . . perceives that the corpse is slowly borne from the eating and sleeping rooms of the house. . . perceives that it waits a little while in the door. . . that it was fittest for its days. . . that its action has descended to the stalwart and wellshaped heir who approaches. . . and that he shall be fittest for his days.<sup>549</sup>

This was a skillful developing of an apparently sensible attitude on the part of the nation which was in turn transferred to the "wellshaped heir," who also had the intelligence to be humble and learn from the past. Whether or not we wish to consider the Preface as a segment of external or internal ethos, the materials were consistent with the image that

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<sup>548</sup>www, p. 36.

<sup>549</sup>LG, p. iii.

Whitman shaped in his reviews and in his personal habits.

In the poetry we most certainly encounter an impression of internal ethos because the author's presence is felt throughout, and Asselineau reacts as other have, saying:

He wanted first of all to appear as an apostle of democracy and as an uncultured man filled with masculine force and a powerful animality. He was especially proud of his "perfect health," of his "reckless health." He gave an impression of firmness and complete confidence in himself bordering on arrogance. He chanted at the top of his lungs his joy in living and creating, and his nonchalance, it seems, was the sign of a perfect physical and moral equilibrium.<sup>550</sup>

In part, Asselineau responded to aspects of external ethos, but the internal ethos was even more telling because there was none of the anonymity of the reviews. There was the direct confrontation with the authorial presence when the reader encountered:

Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos,  
Disorderly fleshy and sensual. . . . eating drinking  
and breeding,  
No sentimentalist. . . . no stander above men and women  
or apart from them. . . . no more modest than  
immodest.<sup>551</sup>

And that I grew six feet high. . . . and that I have  
become a man thirty-six years old in 1855. . . .  
and that I am here anyhow--all are equally  
wonderful.<sup>552</sup>

Taking this straightforward approach, an approach already discussed in connection with authorial presence, Whitman elicited a definite reaction to his personality, and in doing so he asked that his poetry be evaluated on the basis of the reaction. However, he did not stop with the self-portrait. He went on to flatter directly and indirectly all of mankind.

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<sup>550</sup> Asselineau, The Creation of a Personality, pp. 67-68.

<sup>551</sup> Id., p. 29.

<sup>552</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

Shouting "Hurrah for positive Science!" and extolling the virtues of all men regardless of wealth or social status, Whitman told the reader that all men contained everything worthwhile:

It is not you I go argue pro and con about, and to  
settle whether you are alive or no;  
I own publicly who you are, if nobody else owns. . . .  
and see and hear you, and what you give and take;  
What is there you cannot give and take.<sup>553</sup>

He associated himself with all men when he said, "Whatever degrades another degrades me,"<sup>554</sup> and wrote:

I play not a march for victors only. . . . I play great  
marches for conquered and slain persons.

Have you heard that it was good to gain the day?  
I also say it is good to fall. . . . battles are lost  
in the same spirit in which they are won.<sup>555</sup>

It may be that beneath the buoyant optimism and the joie de vivre lurked doubts and a strong death wish,<sup>556</sup> but on the surface, nothing seems more ingenuous than:

Do I contradict myself?  
Very well then. . . . I contradict myself;  
I am large. . . . I contain multitudes.<sup>557</sup>

Regardless of the impression achieved and regardless of Whitman's specific postures within the poetry, the impact of ethical proof cannot be avoided. Emerson did not miss it, commending the "free and brave thought" and the "courage of treatment," not realizing that his testimony would appear in conjunction with Leaves of Grass as Whitman strove

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<sup>553</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>554</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>555</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>556</sup>See Miller for discussion.

<sup>557</sup>Id., p. 55.

to enhance his external ethos.<sup>558</sup> Other critics reacted differently, but in spite of the varied opinions, Whitman was generally consistent in building ethical appeal, and that appeal was internally consistent. In personal appearance, in the Preface and poetry of the 1855 edition, and in the reviews which he wrote, Whitman sought to create an acceptable image. James Miller writes that, "The "I" in any one Whitman poem is not so much a personal reference as a fusion of several characters, a composite character, who exists no place other than in the poem."<sup>559</sup> Nevertheless, the "I" is dominant, and there is no denying the rhetorical orientation in Whitman's reliance upon the effect of ethos.

Whitman's allegiance to this facet of the rhetorical tradition can be partially explained by his consuming desire to put himself on record, but we cannot forget that this desire was never free of rhetorical associations. In all areas discussed above, Whitman moved in the direction of the rhetorical tradition, and it is especially significant that he stressed the creator's personality and the response to it. If hidden and indirect, that personality could never achieve the ultimate goals. Whitman chose the open and direct method of emphasizing the expression of character, the method of the orator.

We have seen that all poets of the era were influenced by rhetorical theory and practice but that with most writers the influence became a mechanical appurtenance instrumental in the production of poetry which has had no lasting impact. There was little change in the tradition during the fifty years following the first edition of Leaves of Grass, for:

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<sup>558</sup>See Allen, Solitary Singer, pp. 152-56.

<sup>559</sup>Miller, p. 67.

The younger generation of the polite world, imitative, well-bred, anaemic, talented, mere shadows of their elders, upheld the genteel tradition, but the sap had gone out of them. What was beautiful became pretty; what was primary, respectable; what was romantic, sentimental; what was philosophical, dull. Poetry suffered most; and writers like Stedman, Stoddard, Taylor, Sill, and Aldrich at regular intervals turned out volumes which the world seldom opens today. . . . amid the materialism of the consulates which stretched from Grant to McKinley, poetry declined.<sup>560</sup>

The rhetorical tradition was one of the causal factors. Whitman reflected the tradition in that he utilized the same point of departure which other poets employed, a point of departure anchored in rhetoric, but not content to merely ape his predecessors and his contemporaries, he penetrated into the tradition, and the poetry which emerged mirrored that penetration.

In throwing aside the shackles of conventions, whether they came from rhetoric or poetic, Whitman actually used the older tradition to foster a new one. It will never be possible to make a precise estimate of his ultimate influence, but there can be no doubt that Whitman was instrumental in paving the way for the freedom enjoyed by the poet of today, a heritage that traces to a complete conception of rhetoric.

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<sup>560</sup>Jones and Leisy, pp. 18-19.



## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

No useful purpose would be served by a simple re-listing of the conclusions reached in the preceeding essays, and this summary will focus upon the more significant aspects of the entire study. That some of the conclusions were qualified does not negate the importance of the results, and the present writer is convinced that this study offers an important key to the understanding of Whitman and his poetry. He is equally convinced that it does not offer the key, and if this summary seems to neglect any qualifications, it is not that they have been forgotten, but that there is a desire to avoid the constant note of apology.

Apology certainly has not been a hallmark of Whitman scholarship, as was demonstrated in the survey with which this study was initiated. We heard from critics who insisted that Whitman's interest in oratory was responsible for the excellence of his poetry. Others claimed that the interest was but a passing dream, and still others asserted that the shortcomings in Leaves of Grass resulted from Whitman's response to the oratorical tradition. The variety and conflict in these differing evaluations lead directly to a problem in Whitman scholarship, a problem which was touched upon earlier but which deserves some further attention here.

Very early in The Merchant of Venice, Shakespeare has Antonio utter a caution with the words, "Mark you this, Bassanio, the devil can

cite scripture for his purpose,"<sup>561</sup> and the advice is most appropriate for anyone approaching the study of Walt Whitman and his poetry. This is not to attribute divine inspiration to his efforts, but recording observations and opinions in newspapers, diaries, letters, and poems, Whitman seems to have registered some comment upon all aspects of American life. The bulk of the written record was made more voluminous during his later years at Camden, years in which he was a garrulous respondent in endless conversations with Horace Traubel.

An accurate assessment of these materials is made more difficult by other factors. Many of Whitman's statements were but partially developed ideas jotted in note form on some scrap of paper. And even more important is the fact that he was inconsistent and contradictory in the opinions he expressed. We need not look to an influence from Hegel or from transcendental metaphysics to understand the lines, "Do I contradict myself? Well then I contradict myself." There is truth in the poetry. Whitman deliberately misled some investigators, and a calculated obfuscation characterized his testimony about his early life.<sup>562</sup> Consequently, the nature of his writing couples with the sheer bulk to create a fertile source for the evolution of opposed and conflicting hypotheses. This is not to imply that some satanic design lurks behind every variant conclusion, but rather complex and complete interpretations of Whitman's life

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<sup>561</sup>Merchant of Venice I. iii. 98.

<sup>562</sup>See Schyberg, pp. 51 ff. for discussion of the New Orleans visit. Also p. 5 where he says, "Walt Whitman's private life was concealed in darkness; with unique and admirable consistency he had destroyed everything which could have thrown light on the puzzling and--for the poetry--decisive periods of his life around, 1848, 1859, and 1865."

and poetry have been fashioned out of materials which are simply too slender to bear the weight of the conclusions.<sup>563</sup> Leslie Fiedler argues that it is time to rescue Whitman from these awkward evaluations,<sup>564</sup> and the effort requires objectivity. The resultant conclusions may be of a less dramatic order than those attaching to the proving of preconceived hypotheses, but the goal of accuracy seems the proper aim, and that end is better served by a more impartial examination of the evidence.

Initiated with the hope of placing Whitman's interest in oratory into proper perspective rather than being prompted by a desire to demonstrate that interest to be of a particular character and magnitude, the present study was at least conceived in objectivity. Further, some measure of objectivity was enforced by the methodology. The pluralistic system brought a number of criteria to bear upon one area of investigation, each criterion coming at a slightly different angle and creating a self-checking operation of critical counterbalances. This development was in the nature of a fringe benefit because the system originally was designed in order to avoid the hazards of categorical distinctions in the discussion of the rhetoric-poetic spectrum. The structuring of a methodology having been one of the basic goals in this study, the system has had to prove its own justification, and the results do support the rationale.

In addition to having nurtured an objective approach, the methodology emphasized the coalescent nature of the rhetorical and poetic enterprises. Of some historical significance, the fusion was of utmost importance in America during the first half of the nineteenth century, and in illuminating this fact, the methodology provides its own excuse for being. With

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<sup>563</sup>Faner and Shephard both illustrate the tendency.

<sup>564</sup>Fiedler, "Images of Walt Whitman."

all poets coming under the sway of the rhetorical tradition, an investigation is less than complete if no cognizance is taken of the merged relationships between rhetoric and poetic. This applies to all poets of the era, and it is particularly applicable to Walt Whitman because of his various attachments to the rhetorical tradition. The methodology utilized not only clarified some of the relationships between rhetoric and poetic, it furnished a superior system for examining Whitman's posture in regard to those relationships because it required that all segments of his interest in rhetoric be taken into account.

The application of the system supported the contention that it is improper and futile to focus upon some isolated aspect of Whitman's experience within the rhetorical tradition, and we must reject as fragmentary those conclusions which stem from such examinations. Included in this rejection is the suggestion that Whitman was briefly or sporadically attracted to rhetorical theory and practice and the notion that he contemplated writing a complete treatise on rhetoric. We must also reject as fragmentary the conclusion which goes no farther than to say that his interest in the rhetorical tradition was lasting and profound. That is an accurate depiction of Whitman's interest, but conclusions worth the remembering must be sought in the effects of that interest, and we have traced those effects in this study.

Had he chosen to do so, Whitman could not have escaped the influence of the rhetorical tradition; it was too much a part of all linguistic communication at the time. But Whitman embraced the tradition as was evidenced in the examination of his association in practice, theory, and criticism.

The accepted portrait of the orator as a god-like figure was most acceptable to Whitman and his ego-involved conception of the creative

artist. His exposure to theory and practice particularized this conception, and primary stress fell upon the impression of personality created in the act of speaking. Unable to achieve the dramatic delivery which he championed, and aware that the act of delivery could not be recorded, Whitman remained content in a dream of becoming a "wander-speaker." The dream, however, became a kind of reality in the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass.

Whitman could not be the masterful orator who shaped the nation's destiny, but he could transfer that function to his poet, and he did. Moreover, the poet of the 1855 edition encompasses the entire province of rhetoric. The subjects are his. The linguistic style is his. The direct confrontation with the audience is his. And the attempt to create a response with ethical proof is his. The rhetorical tradition may not have accounted for all these developments, but it unquestionably was a most important contributing factor.

Whitman's rhetorical orientation helps explain his poetry and gives additional insights as well. In utilizing the first person point-of-view and in striving for effective ethical proof, Whitman put himself in the position of being judged by rhetorical standards. This has happened in debates such as those concerning his sexual behavior, his posing, his metaphysics, and his stand on controversial issues. His poetry demands that some of these things be considered, and since this is foreign to much of contemporary criticism, his having been neglected in some circles is not surprising. On the other hand, the intrusion of the personality into Whitman's poetry and his eager pronouncements have made him an idol for the Beatnik Poets,<sup>565</sup> for they too would stump the country,

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<sup>565</sup>Allen, Man, Poet, and Legend, pp. 101-54.

chanting their message and achieving their greatest moments in public presentation.

This study also supports Bigelow's contention that we know too little about the alliance that existed between rhetoric and poetic in the period examined. Critics and scholars—we heard from Matthiessen and Spencer among others—regularly comment that the oratorical tradition was strong at the time, but the remarks usually remain at the level of the unsupported generalization. We have much to learn about American literature, and a more penetrating examination of those assertions can be of real assistance in that task. Certainly we can ill afford to accept the judgment implied in a recent cultural history of the period where there is no mention made of the oratorical tradition.<sup>566</sup>

It should also be instructive to extend the present examination to include later editions of Leaves of Grass, and further, to general trends in all of modern poetry. If we are to understand the revolution that Whitman is credited with having effected, we must understand the nature of that revolt. In large measure it grew out of the rhetorical tradition.

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<sup>566</sup>Nye.



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Gerald Paul Mohrmann was born September 4, 1925, in Ferndale, Washington. After graduating from Ferndale High School in 1943, he served with infantry and airborne units of the United States Army in the United States, the Philippines, and Japan. His Bachelor of Arts was awarded by Washington State College in 1950 and his Master of Arts by the University of Washington in 1955.

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This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the chairman of the candidate's supervisory committee and has been approved by all members of that committee. It was submitted to the Dean of College of Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate Council, and was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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